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LOVE FROM A STRANGER

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

A Play in Three Acts

(Based on a short story by AGATHA CHRISTIE) -

by

FRANK VOSPER

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CHARACTERS
in the order of their appearance

LOUISE GARRARD

MAVIS

CECILY HARRINGTON

BRUCE LOVELL

NIGEL

HODGSON

ETHEL

DR. GRIBBLE

SYNOPSIS OF SCENERY

ACT ONE

- SCENE I. *Cecily* and *Mavis's* flat in Bayswater.
Early in March.
- SCENE II. The same. Two hours later.

ACT TWO

- SCENE I. The cottage. Six weeks later.
- SCENE II. The same. September.

ACT THREE

- SCENE I. The same. A fortnight later.
- SCENE II. The same. Forty minutes later.

ACT ONE

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ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

SCENE : The sitting-room of a "flat," which is actually the top floor of a house in Bayswater.

At the moment it is being prepared for being "Let Furnished." Certain more personal treasures are being packed away in a small trunk which is in the middle of the room.

LOUISE GARRARD (AUNTIE LOO-LOO) *is bending over the case, presenting a fair and square view of her lower dorsal curves to the audience as she does so. She is a professional "fusser." She holds her inelegant pose for quite a long time, then straightens herself and goes to the mantelpiece and picks up one of the Dresden candlesticks, then calls to some one in the next room.*

AUNTIE L. : You surely aren't going to leave these lovely candlesticks out, Mavis ?

MAVIS (*off*) : What ?

AUNTIE L. : *The candlesticks !* You'll want them packed away, won't you ?

MAVIS : Do you think so ?

AUNTIE L. : Well, you know what strange servants are—if the people who take the flat keep a servant—maids are so clumsy and heavy-handed these days. (*Dusting the candlesticks.*) I can remember them ever since I was quite a tiny tot. My mother—Cecily's grandmother, you know—used to say they were absolutely unique. The Garrards always had *such* good taste. I remember—— (*She drops the candlestick.*) Oh, dear me !

MAVIS (off): What was that?

AUNTIE L.: Nothing, dear, nothing. (*Picking up the candlestick which is broken in two, she snatches up a piece of newspaper.*) Somehow one of the candlesticks slipped through my fingers. (*She quickly wraps up the pieces.*)

MAVIS (off): Is it damaged?

AUNTIE L. (*looking at the parcel*): Er—no—er—not noticeably. (*She hurries to the trunk and packs the parcel.*)

The phone rings.

(*Answering it, very loudly.*) Hallo? Hallo? . . . Yes—no—er, that is, I don't know. (*Shouting to the other room.*) Mavis, what is this number, I never can remember!

MAVIS (off): 2638.

AUNTIE L. (*in phone*): Oh, yes, yes, this is 2638 . . . yes, that's right . . . flat to let—well, that is to say, it's more of a maisonette, the bathroom and the—er—is a floor lower, but really it's quite— (*Indignantly.*) No certainly not, of course it's not the maid speaking—the maid's away having her wisdom teeth out. I am Miss Harrington's aunt, I'm helping my niece and her friend get the place ready for tenants. . . . Oh, yes, it's furnished, beautifully furnished—you *want* it furnished? . . . Well, then, that's splendid, isn't it? . . . Oh, you don't want it furnished . . . but I don't understand, this is a *furnished* flat.

MAVIS, a pleasant, calm-faced woman of about thirty, with a firm manner, has entered the room and is listening to the tangle. She carries a small drawer which she puts down near the desk left, where it remains for the rest of the act.

AUNTIE L. (*in a piercing whisper to MAVIS*): Some one inquiring about the flat. (*In phone.*) But I really can't understand—you don't mean to tell me that the house-agents . . . No, no, this is to be let *furnished*— How

ACT I.—SCENE I.

dare you, I'm not shouting. . . . Here, Mavis, please deal with this, they're being so tiresome—some muddle-headed woman !

She hands the phone over to MAVIS.

MAVIS (*calmly*) : Hallo—yes . . . yes. . . . No, I'm afraid not. . . . Quite so. . . . No, not at all. Good-bye. (*She hangs up receiver.*) Some mistake on the part of the agent.

AUNTIE L. : Oh, I see—well, there was no necessity for the woman to be so offensive . . . are you quite sure those house agents are really good ?

MAVIS : They seemed as good as any house-agents can be, Miss Garrard.

AUNTIE L. : Well, I dare say you know best and, of course, it's not for me to interfere. I'm merely Cecily's aunt and her only relation, but personally I always think that Harrods. . . . By the by, Cecily's being a long time over her shopping. I do hope nothing's happened to her.

MAVIS : Oh, no—she had a lot of things to get.

AUNTIE L. (*pessimistically*) : The traffic is so dreadful nowadays—those red and green lights, you never know when they're going to—and those horrid escalators—I never know which foot to—do you really think you ought to leave out those silver vases ?

MAVIS : We can't let the place if it looks like a prison, can we ?

AUNTIE L. : No . . . no, of course not, but people are so untrustworthy nowadays.

MAVIS : There are always references.

AUNTIE L. : Ah ! But they can be forged. I read in the paper the other day about a place in Soho where they even make false passports. Then, of course, Soho—all those Italians.

MAVIS : Oh, but we wouldn't dream of letting the flat to any one from Soho.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

AUNTIE L.: I do believe you're making fun of me! . . . Anyway, they can't possibly need all these cushions. (*She collects them, eyeing MAVIS with resentment.*) Mavis, dear, I hope—I do hope you're not letting yourself get a little embittered?

MAVIS: Embittered?

AUNTIE L.: Of course, I know it's very difficult for you. Cecily getting married after you've been together all this time—we're none of us as young as we were.

MAVIS: Don't I know it! However, I've still got my teeth.

AUNTIE L.: The flat would be so depressing without Cecily to brighten it up; I think you're so wise going away immediately after her wedding.

MAVIS: Yes, a three months' holiday all over Europe will be too wonderful when I've never had more than a fortnight on the South Coast all my life—oh, what a blessing it's been, us winning that sweep!

AUNTIE L.: I wonder.

MAVIS: What do you mean?

AUNTIE L.: Well, Mavis . . . to tell you the truth, I'm worried.

MAVIS: Oh? (*gently*) Er—more than usual?

AUNTIE L.: About Cecily, it seems to me that winning this ten thousand pounds has upset her.

MAVIS: Heavens, no! Why, she's been absolutely radiant about it.

AUNTIE L.: No, you don't understand. I mean as regards Nigel.

There is a pause. MAVIS knows what LOUISE is driving at, and is in agreement with her, though she isn't going to admit it.

She's been engaged to him all these years while he's been slaving in the Sudan—all those horrid black people—and

ACT I.—SCENE I.

now he's transferred to England with an appointment with three times better pay—she's to be married next week—and she doesn't even go to meet him at the station!

MAVIS: But Nigel particularly asked her not to. You know how uncertain these boat-trains are. They keep you hanging about the station for hours.

AUNTIE L.: What does that matter to a girl in love?

MAVIS: But Nigel himself—

AUNTIE L.: And it isn't only that—it's her whole attitude, she doesn't seem in the least like a "bride-to-be."

MAVIS: What do you expect her to do? Arrange flowers all day, humming the Jewel song from *Faust*—"with a little secret smile on her lips"?

AUNTIE L.: I've spoken to her about it, but you can't get anything out of her—you can't nail things down.

MAVIS: Is it absolutely necessary to?

AUNTIE L.: One likes to know how things stand.

MAVIS: Can things stand if you nail them down?

AUNTIE L. (*oversweetly*): You know, Mavis, dear, sometimes I find you a little difficult to talk to.

MAVIS: I'm sorry.

AUNTIE L.: I was merely suggesting that the excitement of winning that sweep together seemed to have slightly altered Cecily's attitude to her marriage, and I think it's a pity. If only she could have married Nigel before.

MAVIS: They couldn't possibly have managed on Nigel's pay.

AUNTIE L.: Love could have found the way.

MAVIS: If you'll forgive me saying so, Miss Garrard, your mind is rather full of conventional phrases, you mustn't be disappointed if they don't always fit the context.

AUNTIE L.: I don't quite follow.

MAVIS: Well, "bride-to-be" for instance. In her own way, I have no doubt that Cecily is thrilled to the marrow

about her marriage—she's devoted to Nigel—she's never missed a single mail writing to him—he's spent all his leaves with her—they're an ideal couple and Cecily realises it, but she just doesn't show it in the fashion you approve. Girls don't nowadays.

AUNTIE L. (*huffily*): Of course, it isn't the first occasion I've been told I was behind the times.

MAVIS: Please, Miss Garrard, I was simply trying to explain.

AUNTIE L.: But not to meet him at the station—why, to a girl in love even Liverpool Street could be—— Oh, dear, now the gas has gone out! (*She goes to her handbag and takes out a shilling which she puts in the meter—she lights the gas-stove during the ensuing dialogue.*)

The 'phone rings.

MAVIS (*answering it*): Hallo? Yes . . . yes. . . . Furnished for three months. . . . Yes, four guineas. . . . Certainly. . . . You can see it whenever you like. . . .

AUNTIE L. (*urgently*): Not this morning, with Nigel arriving.

MAVIS (*in phone*): Let me see, perhaps this aft—— Oh, no. Hallo! No! Hi! Listen. Hallo, hallo! Oh, damn!

AUNTIE L. (*gloating*): Now what's happened?

MAVIS: A man coming to see the flat. I tried to stop him, but he'd rung off, he just said, "Right, I'll come round at once."

AUNTIE L.: He must be an impulsive sort of person.

MAVIS: He had a slight American accent.

AUNTIE L.: Ah, that would account for it. Did he tell you his name?

MAVIS: No.

AUNTIE L.: How very odd! . . . But then, of course, Americans . . .

ACT I.—SCENE I.

MAVIS : Oh, well, I don't suppose it'll matter. Nigel's train isn't due in for another hour, and it'll probably be late. I read something about fog in the Channel.

AUNTIE L. (*pouncing*) : Fog ! A cousin of mine was once in a collision in a fog—just off Ramsgate it was. He was the only survivor and I remember he said——

The front door slams.

MAVIS : There's Cecily.

AUNTIE L. : She'll be worn out with her shopping when she ought to be looking her best to welcome Nigel.

Enter CECILY HARRINGTON, she is about thirty. She is very pleasant looking without possessing striking looks—she is prettier now than she has even been in her life before, because she can afford at last to spend money on her appearance. She has a load of parcels which she deposits on the table.

AUNTIE L. : Oh, you poor child !

CECILY (*looking around bewildered*) : Why, what's the matter ?

AUNTIE L. : You must be so tired.

CECILY : My dear Auntie Loo-Loo—why ?

AUNTIE L. : Tramping around all those shops.

CECILY : It was only one shop and I didn't tramp, I was conducted around, and by such a nice young man. . . . Don't do all that packing, Mavis, dear, I must do my share. . . . Extraordinarily attentive and efficient he was. Isn't it amazing how really charming a good salesman can be ?

AUNTIE L. : You must have been lucky—I rarely meet one.

CECILY : To be able to rise above the dreary routine of a big shop, to retain your personality and appear interested in a customer you don't actually care two hoots about.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

MAVIS (*laughing*): You seem to have fallen heavily for him.

CECILY: My dear, you and I know what routine means—the *ghastly* boredom! (*She glances at her watch, checking it by the clock on the mantelpiece.*) Is that clock right?

MAVIS: I think it's a little slow.

AUNTIE L. (*heavily playful*): far too slow for little Cecily, I should imagine, eh?

CECILY: Why? (*Embarrassed as she understands.*) Oh, I see. . . .

AUNTIE L.: And now I'm going to be a tactful old Auntie Loo-Loo and go out for a couple of hours. (*Begins to put on hat and coat.*)

CECILY: Oh, but really, you needn't . . .

AUNTIE L.: Stuff and nonsense, you'll want to be alone when Nigel arrives.

CECILY: Dear Auntie Loo-Loo, I—

AUNTIE L.: And I've got plenty to do. I shall go to Harrods and put this flat on their books. I don't altogether trust that agent. Then I shall lunch in their restaurant—a little sole—no, perhaps sweetbreads, and then a meringue—and be back about half-past two. You'll have both of you calmed down a bit by then, I expect.

CECILY: Calmed down?

AUNTIE L.: The first raptures of reunion! Oh, I understand so well. . . . You must be patient, little Cecily.

AUNTIE L. *pats CECILY's hand, MAVIS puts her handkerchief in her mouth.*

AUNTIE L.: Only another hour, or perhaps an hour and a half, and he'll be here, standing in the doorway, gazing at his sweetheart, and then, bronzed and handsome, he'll stride across the room and take you in his arms.

CECILY (*making a comic face*): Crickey!

AUNTIE L.: Really, Cecily! (*In a buff.*) In my young

ACT I.—SCENE I.

days a girl—— Oh, well, I give it up! This generation is beyond me. (*She goes to the door.*) I shall see you after lunch.

She exits.

There is a pause, the outer door slams. MAVIS removes the handkerchief and bursts into peals of laughter, in which CECILY joins. MAVIS gradually recovers.

MAVIS: Auntie Loo-Loo is disappointed in you. You're not reacting according to schedule—she wants flushed cheeks, dancing eyes and a correctly palpitating heart.

There is a pause. CECILY becomes serious.

CECILY: So do I.

MAVIS: Cecily!

CECILY: Oh, don't pretend to be surprised. You've had a pretty shrewd idea what my feelings have been for some time.

MAVIS: Well, in a way, yes; even Auntie Loo-Loo seemed to have got some sort of inkling in her head, but I wasn't going to agree with her. What is it—are you unhappy?

CECILY: No, it's not that I'm unhappy, exactly—oh, no, I'm far too excited still to be unhappy, over the sweep and leaving the office. But I *am* worried—terribly worried.

MAVIS: Over Nigel?

CECILY: Yes; I can't help it. One must be honest with oneself, but it all seems so dull.

MAVIS: Dull?

CECILY: Yes, dull. . . . Nigel and I are fond of each other, of course.

MAVIS: Very fond, surely?

CECILY: Certainly, but we've known each other for years. I admit we're well suited, but there isn't anything more. It's such a very tepid romance.

MAVIS: My dear Cecily, I'm sure lots of girls feel like

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

this after they've been engaged a long time, but they marry and settle down, and live happily ever afterwards.

CECILY : I suppose so. I don't know.

MAVIS : Nigel's so sound and steady.

CECILY : You're saying the wrong thing, Mavis. At the moment I want excitement. Life's been so deadly monotonous up to now.

MAVIS : It must have been pretty monotonous for Nigel.

CECILY : Yes, but the whole thing is he's breaking away from it all now, coming back to England to something totally fresh—that's just the point. The office has been the Sudan as far as I'm concerned—now I want a change.

MAVIS : Yes, I see what you mean.

CECILY : Day after day, year after year. Getting up in the morning, having to be at the office in time. Always the neat, efficient secretary. "Yes, Mr. Cohen." . . . "No, Mr. Cohen." . . . "Certainly, Mr. Cohen." That dreadful fat stomach. Going out to lunch, then rushing back. The journey home in the bus, fagged out. Girls lolling on the seats reading novels, dreadful trashy novels mostly, but exciting. That's what we all want—excitement. Oh, I do so want to live—to live, before I'm grey and old and dead.

MAVIS : Can I get you a glass of water, dear, after all that ?

CECILY : Oh, I know it sounds schoolgirlish, but believe me, it isn't a passing mood. Subconsciously I've always craved for adventure and then when we won all this money—I saw that at last I'd got the chance of it. Do you know the first thing I did ?

MAVIS : No, tell me.

CECILY : I wrote to Nigel, asking him if he'd postpone our wedding.

MAVIS : What reason did you give him ?

ACT I.—SCENE I.

CECILY : I said I wanted just a little time to enjoy my freedom in my own way.

MAVIS : What did Nigel say ?

CECILY : He was terribly hurt, he'd planned everything so minutely—men do when they're shut away in outlandish places. Just one week after his arrival to get clothes and arrange details and then a special licence, a short honeymoon—in England, mind you—because he's seen nothing of it for so long—and then—Golders Green.

A pause.

MAVIS : Well, after all, why not ? It's what you've always planned yourself.

CECILY : Yes, I know, but now I feel I want something more broadening than warming Nigel's slippers in front of the fire—just for a little while, Mavis, that's all.

MAVIS : But, my dear, you do love Nigel ?

CECILY : That's just it. Do I ? Have I ever loved Nigel ? Or did I simply think he would do ? That he was a means of escape from the office ? It's an ugly thought—but it might be true.

MAVIS : No, Cecily, you're doing yourself an injustice.

CECILY : Well, all I know now is that marriage with Nigel seems like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire, exchanging one monotony for another, domestic duties instead of office routine—and then, of course, very soon there'd be swarms of children.

MAVIS : But, my dear, there needn't be.

CECILY : I tell you there would. I've never seen the point of marrying unless you have children. I know perfectly well I should be having hundreds and hundreds of babies all over the place, at the most inconvenient moments. . . . They'd never stop giving me the King's Bounty.

They both laugh.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

MAVIS : You dear old idiot, you're not really serious.

CECILY (*suddenly grave again*) : I do so wish I wasn't.

She crosses to a bureau, opens a drawer and produces an unstamped sealed letter.

Last night I wrote this to Nigel.

MAVIS : Oh, Cecily, *not*—— ?

CECILY : Yes, breaking off our engagement.

MAVIS : But you can't, after all these years.

CECILY : Well, if he won't postpone it, there's nothing else for it. It wouldn't be fair to marry him as I feel at present—would it ?

MAVIS : Perhaps not. But what are you proposing to do?

CECILY : Last night I was proposing to clear out of here this morning and leave this note for him when he arrives.

MAVIS : Oh, but that would be cruel.

CECILY : Yes, I know, but if you're going to be hurt, don't you think it's better to have it in one clean cut ?

MAVIS : I suppose so. But you've altered your mind this morning ?

CECILY : I've decided now to make one last appeal to Nigel to postpone the wedding.

MAVIS : What will you do in the meantime ?

CECILY : Travel, meet people, let off steam generally.

MAVIS : And if he refuses ?

CECILY (*quietly*) : I shall break with him . . . definitely.

There is a long pause.

MAVIS : Well, I think you're a fool.

CECILY : Please, Mavis ! I'd hoped you'd back me up. We nearly always agree over most things.

MAVIS : Not over this. The wretched money has thrown you off your balance. In Nigel you've got the makings of a damn fine husband—you can't afford to turn a man like that down. Yes, and you needn't tell me

ACT I.—SCENE I.

that you're quite content to remain a spinster. I know you better. You're just being schoolgirlish.

CECILY (*angrily*): Oh, shut up!

MAVIS: It's no use our getting angry, we're simply telling each other the truth . . . you're over-excited, my girl; that's what's the matter with you. You're throwing away your chances of something sane and happy for some entirely fictitious idea of "seeing life." What on earth does that mean exactly?

CECILY (*at a loss*): Well . . . well, for instance . . .

MAVIS: Paris, I suppose, sitting in an underground night-club, drinking creme-de-menthe frappe, with a lot of grey-faced degenerates.

CECILY: Don't be ridiculous.

MAVIS: Monte Carlo then, with rude old gentlemen in panama hats, pinching your behind in the casino?

CECILY: Mavis!

MAVIS *has bounced into her room.*

MAVIS (*off*): The wide open spaces perhaps, the rolling sea, for God's sake! (*She emerges with hat and coat which she puts on.*) You'll end up on the boat-deck being mauled by a pimply young wireless operator who bites his nails.

CECILY: You're impossible—you're as bad as Auntie Loo-Loo.

MAVIS: Well, anyway, I'm going to follow her example by being "Oh, so tactful," and clearing out of the way for a bit. Nigel ought to be here soon now if the fog hasn't held him up.

CECILY *doesn't answer.* MAVIS *relents and comes to her.* Cheer up, dear. It'll all come out in the wash.

CECILY (*dully*): I hope so.

MAVIS: So long!

She goes out.

Left alone CECILY paces the room restlessly. Then helps

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

herself to a cigarette from a box on the table, a box that is actually a handsomely bound volume with the inside converted to contain cigarettes. She stands lost in concentrated thought; at length she appears to make up her mind—she puts on her hat and coat with determination, crosses to the bureau, takes out the letter, places it on the mantelpiece, then goes to the door. She stands holding the handle in a fresh agony of indecision. She comes back into the room, pulls off her hat and coat slowly, goes to the mantelpiece, looking at the letter.

As she does so, BRUCE LOVELL appears quietly in the doorway. He is between thirty and thirty-five, about six feet in height, powerfully built. His appearance radiates health, and he has very fine teeth. His hair is a strong crisp golden. His manner is a strange mixture of shyness and utter unself-consciousness. He speaks with a slight American accent which is sufficiently soft to be attractive. He watches CECILY for a few moments while she removes her hat as she stands looking at the note on the mantelpiece, then he speaks.

BRUCE: Well, I came as quick as ever I could.

CECILY swings round startled.

CECILY: Ni——! (*She realises her mistake.*) Oh, I—I thought you were somebody else.

BRUCE: Sorry to disappoint you.

CECILY (*flummoxed*): Oh—er—not at—er—what do you——? Er—how did you——?

BRUCE: The door was left open, so I just walked in. I hope you don't mind.

She stares at him, still rather nonplussed. He remains at the door.

CECILY: Er—what—what do you want?

BRUCE (*smiling*): You must have rather a short memory. I spoke to you just now on the phone.

ACT I.—SCENE I.

CECILY: Spoke to——? Oh, but I'm afraid there's some mistake. I've been out all the morning. I've only just come in, and I haven't spoken to anybody on the phone.

BRUCE: Not about this flat of yours that you want to rent?

CECILY: About the flat? Oh, of course, I see, yes. --. . I expect you spoke to my friend—she's just gone out—she must have forgotten to tell me.

BRUCE: Yes, that must be it. I thought your voice sounded rather different to the one I spoke with on the phone.

CECILY: Mavis and I are supposed to speak very much alike.

BRUCE: I prefer your voice.

His manner is so direct that it is impossible to resent anything he says, but she is a little taken aback. A slight pause.

CECILY (*recovering herself, rather nervously*): Oh, but what am I thinking of? Won't you sit down?

BRUCE: Thank you. (*He does so.*) You were expecting somebody else?

CECILY: Er—yes—er, my fiancé, he's returning from the Sudan to-day.

BRUCE: Oh? That's well for you, isn't it?

CECILY (*without enthusiasm*): Yes. . . . Well, now I'd better show you round. This—er—well, this is the sitting-room—rather an obvious remark—but there it is.

BRUCE: That's a grand table—is it real?

CECILY: Yes, we've got one or two rather nice pieces, my mother left them to me.

BRUCE: Charming atmosphere! I'm very sensitive to atmosphere, aren't you?

CECILY: I don't know.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

BRUCE: I'm sure you are. I'm rather quick at summing people up.

CECILY: Oh?

BRUCE: I've had to be, with the sort of life I've led.

CECILY (*intrigued*): Really—and have you summed me up already?

BRUCE: Oh, no, only slightly; you're not as easy as all that.

CECILY: May I take that as a compliment?

BRUCE: You may.

He smiles at her and there is a little pause. She becomes slightly embarrassed again, and crosses to another door.

CECILY (*opening it*): This is the dining-room.

BRUCE (*crossing over and looking in*): Very cosy. I like that picture over the mantelpiece.

CECILY: It belonged to my mother too. I think it's a picture of some place in Greece.

BRUCE: It's the Gulf of Corinth. I know the exact spot.

CECILY: Do you really?

BRUCE: I remember waking up very early and going up on deck in the dawn. You never saw anything so lovely—the mountains, snow-capped, then pale violet and deep mauve, reflected in the sea . . . and the sea cold and still like jade.

CECILY: How heavenly! (*She sighs.*) I've never travelled.

BRUCE: But you'd like to?

CECILY: It's my great ambition.

BRUCE: Everybody ought to travel, it keeps alive the spirit of adventure and that's all to the good, it seems to me.

CECILY (*delighted*): Oh, yes! . . . Yes.

BRUCE: It's up to us to see all we can of the world—to appreciate it, instead of pushing it away in a lumber-room like a dud wedding-present.

ACT I.—SCENE I.

CECILY: Oh, I do so agree—you know it's funny, I shouldn't have thought you were at all—er . . .

BRUCE: At all what?

CECILY: Well, capable of such—er—how shall I put it? —er—self-expression.

BRUCE: I look too much of a roughneck—is that it?

CECILY (*laughing*): No, really I meant that men of your type usually grunt and puff harder at their pipes when you draw their attention to something lovely—but you seem to have a real appreciation of beauty.

BRUCE (*gazing at her*): I have, indeed.

Another pause.

CECILY: You'll want to see the bedrooms, there are two of them—this way.

He follows her out of the room and you hear them talking off stage.

CECILY (*off*): This is Mavis's room. I'm afraid my room is rather untidy.

BRUCE (*off*): Never mind.

CECILY (*off*): One gets quite a nice view out of that window.

BRUCE (*off*): Grand! Is that the park over there?

CECILY (*off*): Yes, it's really quite charming, particularly in the spring.

BRUCE (*off*): I'm sure it is. This is the room I shall use.

CECILY (*returning*): Are you going to keep a servant? Because if you are—

They both re-enter the room.

I can put you on to quite a good daily woman.

BRUCE: Well, I don't know. I guess I'll look after myself for a bit, I've been doing so for the last eighteen months and I've got kind of used to it.

CECILY: How long did you want the place for?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

BRUCE: Oh, any time. How long do you want to let it for?

CECILY: Well, Mavis—my friend—will be away three months at least.

BRUCE: That's all right by me.

CECILY: Will you require plate and linen?

BRUCE (*fogged*): Plate and linen?

CECILY: Yes.

BRUCE: Well, I suppose I need plates to eat off—but I reckon I can buy them at a store.

CECILY: No—no—I mean silver, knives, forks and spoons.

BRUCE: Oh, yes—please.

CECILY: And linen—sheets and pillow-cases.

BRUCE: Oh, yes, rather. I hadn't thought of—— (*He breaks off laughing at himself.*) You must think me no end of a dumb cluck, but you see, I've never taken a flat before.

CECILY (*smiling*): I rather guessed as much.

BRUCE: No. You see, I've always wandered about up till now. I left this country when I was seventeen. I went to South Africa first and stayed there a long while. I went crazy over the veldt—so would you—it got into my blood. Then East—Indo-China. I got lost there and lived with a savage tribe for six months—very decent, respectable little people too, except on party nights. I say—I hope I'm not boring you?

CECILY: No, no, do go on.

BRUCE: After that I was in Japan for a time, but I didn't care for it much.

CECILY: How was that?

BRUCE: I dunno; the Japanese didn't seem to me to be—well, they didn't seem to be at all Japanese. After that I drifted over to 'Frisco and the Yukon.

ACT I.—SCENE I.

CECILY : I know, where men are men, and Dangerous Dan McGrew and all that.

BRUCE : Yes, all that bunk. For the last two years I've been living in a shack by the side of a Canadian river.

CECILY : How lovely.

BRUCE : Oh, I dunno ; a bit lonesome—there's nobody to talk to except the beavers and they're far too busy to be good conversationalists. So you see, I must ask you to forgive me if I'm too garrulous now, and not very—er—civilised.

CECILY : It's a nice change not to be too civilised.

BRUCE : Most women don't think so.

CECILY : Don't they ?

BRUCE : Not in my experience, most women like living soft. They like permanent waves, cinemas and ice-cream sodas. They hate adventure, or roughing it.

CECILY : I don't think that's quite true. The trouble is, most women don't get the chance of adventure.

BRUCE : If they did get the chance they'd turn it down.

CECILY : I shouldn't. I'm sure I shouldn't.

BRUCE : No ? Well, maybe you're different, in fact, I'm sure you are.

A pause.

CECILY : Well, do you think you'd like to take the place—Mr.—er—

BRUCE : Oh, but of course I haven't told you my name, have I ? Lovell—Bruce Lovell.

CECILY (*trying it*) : Bruce Lovell.

BRUCE : You see, Miss—er—well, now isn't that funny ? I don't know your name either.

CECILY : Harrington—Cecily Harrington.

He produces a notebook.

BRUCE : I'll just make a note of that, if you don't mind.

CECILY (*smiling*) : How very methodical.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

BRUCE (*writing*): Miss Cecily Harrington. H-A-R-R-
Yes, it's a habit of mine. I'm much more precise than
you'd imagine.

CECILY: Really?

BRUCE: I think it's the result of living alone so much.
You see, if one doesn't have things shipshape, if one
doesn't do things in their right order, one's liable to get
very slovenly living out in the wilds. I don't mean that
I dress for dinner or anything like that—but you've got
to keep a hold on yourself.

CECILY: I understand.

BRUCE: You know, if ever I have anything important
to do I always make an exact time for it, write it down
and stick to it. You'd be no end amused if you knew
some of the things I've got written down here. For
instance, regularly right through the year, once a fortnight
I've made a note.

CECILY: What is it?

BRUCE: "Get your hair cut."

They both laugh.

CECILY: Now, really, we must be business-like. You
do want to take the place then?

BRUCE: Sure I do! It suits me down to the ground.
It's just the sort of place I dreamed about having. You
see, I haven't any real plans, I just thought I'd take a
little place, and have a good time—and look round and
decide what I really wanted to do.

CECILY: I see.

BRUCE: You've no idea how exciting it is to be in
London again after all these years. All the while I've
been out there I've been promising myself a swell time
one day. Sometimes I didn't believe it would ever happen.
But it has. I struck it lucky and here I am in London
with money to burn.

ACT I.—SCENE I.

CECILY: It must be rather thrilling.

BRUCE: Well, you know how it is, when you've looked forward to something—when you've planned the things you're going to do.

CECILY: Oh, yes. I know so well. I've done it for years. All the time I've been grinding away in an office I was always planning what I'd do if I had some money of my own—though I never dreamed I should have. And then, quite suddenly, like a fairy tale it happened. Mavis and I won second prize in a sweep—twenty thousand pounds—ten thousand each.

BRUCE: Gosh! Let me look at you, I've never met anybody who'd won a big sweep before. I've never believed they were real people, somehow. . . . I've always thought they were just a lot of names that were made up in the newspaper offices.

CECILY: Yes, I know what you mean.

BRUCE: If it isn't an impertinence—what are you going to do with it? I mean—are you going to travel, or what?

CECILY: Well, I was supposed to be getting married.

BRUCE: Married. Oh, I see. Yes, to this fiancé you were expecting. Here, I'd better scram!

CECILY: Oh, no, he can't possibly arrive for another half-hour.

BRUCE: It certainly is terrible the way I go chattering on, but, you know, it's funny, but somehow I find you particularly easy to talk to.

CECILY: Yes, it's strange, but I feel the same way. I think you inspire confidence, somehow.

BRUCE (*elated*): Do you think so? Do you really think so?

She nods.

Do you mind if I ask you a question?

CECILY: Go ahead.

BRUCE: Why did you say you were *supposed* to be getting married?

CECILY: Because I'm in a state of indecision about it—somehow or other things have changed.

BRUCE (*simply*): You mean that since you've won this money you want to enjoy a little independence before you settle down?

CECILY (*gaping at him in astonishment*): But how on earth could you possibly guess that?

BRUCE: I told you I was used to summing people up quickly.

CECILY (*still breathless*): Yes, but even so . . .

BRUCE: And then, you see, I found you a particularly interesting subject . . . from the first moment I saw you.

There is another pause. Her eyes shift away from his.

CECILY: Won't you have a cigarette?

She hands him the cigarette box.

BRUCE: Say, that's a cute idea; fancy making a cigarette box out of a book.

CECILY: There was quite a vogue for them a few years ago—it's rather a nice binding. My fiancé gave it to me.

BRUCE: It's a new one on me. (*He has taken a cigarette and is looking at the title of the book.*) *The Arabian Nights*. . . Well, well, well. How that takes me back! I remember as a kid how sorry I was for that poor girl that had to tell the sultan all those stories.

CECILY: Scheherazade, you mean?

BRUCE: That's the dame.

CECILY: Yes. It's a ghastly thought, having to make up a fresh story every night to save your life.

BRUCE: And yet, after all, no worse than being a serial writer. How long have you been engaged to this—

CECILY: Well, actually, about five years, but I've known him all my life. You see, after my mother died I was left

ACT I.—SCENE I.

alone and—well, we became engaged, as a matter of course.

BRUCE: When did you see him last?

CECILY: Three years ago when he was home on leave. I was with him every moment when I wasn't at the office.

BRUCE: D'you mean to say he was content to be engaged all this time.

CECILY: But, of course.

BRUCE: No "of course" about it. He ought to have whisked you off with him to the Soudan.

CECILY: But he couldn't, his pay wasn't sufficient. You see, his job——

BRUCE: Hell! He could get another job.

CECILY: That's difficult in these days.

BRUCE: Nothing's difficult if you've got sufficient reason for it. There's nothing in the world you can't get if you make up your mind to it. . . . Hanging about for five years. Gosh, it beats me. . . . Why, if I'd been—well, I should call it half-hearted.

CECILY: Oh, no, no. He's devoted to me, and so am I to him—in a way, but it's almost as though I knew him too well.

BRUCE: Exactly! He's gone stale on you.

CECILY (*with a smile*): That's not a very nice way of putting it, and yet . . . he's been so patient. He's such a dear. Oh, I don't know—it's all so terribly difficult.

There is a long pause.

The sunshine outside begins to fade. During the following scene it becomes evident that the sky has clouded over.

BRUCE: Be honest with yourself, and then you'll be honest with him.

CECILY: I know . . . I know.

BRUCE: Can I help you?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

She doesn't answer, her head is still averted.

Look at me a moment?

She turns to him.

Are you terribly glad and excited that he's coming back?

(*Silence.*) No, you're not.

CECILY: No.

BRUCE: Can you possibly be in love with him then?

Slowly she sinks her head. He rises and comes to her.

Please, don't think I'm being impertinent and butting in, but, somehow, I can't help thinking of your happiness. You may make a mistake now and the real thing may come along too late.

CECILY (*looking up*): But how can I be sure this isn't the real thing.

BRUCE (*his gaze is almost hypnotic*): It isn't. You know it isn't—don't you?

CECILY: I suppose so.

BRUCE: Oh, I understand so well what you're going through, I've been through the same sort of thing.

CECILY: *You* have?

BRUCE: There have been girls I've met that I've liked plenty, everything's been very—er—suitable, and all that. And I've thought, why not settle down and be happy?—nice girl—a lot in common—I'm very fond of her, and so on. All so easy. And yet—all along—I've known that one day—one day when I least expected it, I would walk into a room and see a girl—and it would be all over—like that. (*He snaps his finger.*)

CECILY: Do you think it can happen like that?

BRUCE: It has happened—to-day.

A long pause.

CECILY: You must be mad.

BRUCE: I know it looks like it—but just consider my position. I hadn't got time to take the usual line. Situated

ACT I.—SCENE I.

as you are you may commit yourself at any minute. I had to speak at once, even at the risk of appearing a lunatic to you.

CECILY: But . . . but half an hour ago I had never met you.

BRUCE (*simply*): I know, that's what's so wonderful.

CECILY (*desperately*): These things don't happen. -

BRUCE: They do, my dear. You have happened—to me. You know that. (*Pause.*) You do know it—don't you?

CECILY: It isn't possible.

BRUCE: From the very first moment that I saw you as you turned round from the mantelpiece, I knew. I could see everything in your eyes. You thought for a moment I was your fiancé, your feelings showed so clearly, the desire for escape, the unhappiness at hurting some one who cares for you, and beneath it all your craving for life and adventure calling to mine.

She turns away from him.

You believe me? Even if things are quite hopeless for me it will be something, if only you tell me you believe me. (*He turns her round to him.*) Please.

CECILY: Yes, I do believe you.

He turns away with a sigh of relief. He wanders about the room thoughtfully. He opens the dining-room door and stands looking in, presumably at the picture.

BRUCE: This isn't going to end here, you know.

CECILY: It must.

BRUCE: It can't. I'm going to see you again . . . soon . . . to-day.

CECILY: Out of the question.

BRUCE: Come and lunch with me now.

CECILY: It's no use talking like this.

BRUCE: You can write a note for him.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY: I've done that already.

BRUCE: You have? Well, then——

CECILY: It would be too horribly cruel. I must give him one more chance.

BRUCE: Half-measures are fatal.

CECILY: I must risk that.

Another pause. BRUCE comes to a decision.

BRUCE: All right, I give in—for the moment—but I tell you what I'll do. I'm going to the Savoy Grill. I shall wait for you in the vestibule till—what's the time now?—ten to one—till three o'clock.

CECILY: They'll have you turned out for loitering or something.

BRUCE: I should worry. Will you—in the event of things not being O.K. with your fiancé—will you promise to come and join me?

CECILY: But why?

BRUCE: You don't actually dislike me, do you?

She hesitates, his frankness compels her.

CECILY: No.

BRUCE: If there wasn't somebody else I might stand some sort of a chance?

CECILY: I—I don't know. What a very impulsive creature you are!

BRUCE: So are you at heart, but you've never had the chance to give way to it.

CECILY: No, that's true.

BRUCE: Anyway, I want you to get to know me better and lunch is as good a way as any. You'll be able to make sure that I don't eat peas with a knife or insult the waiters. We could go for a walk in the park afterwards, it's a lovely day.

CECILY (*looking out of the window*): It's clouded over.

BRUCE: It's only a shower, you'll see!

ACT I.—SCENE I.

CECILY (*laughing*): Persuasion is your strong point, isn't it?

BRUCE: Haven't you got the loveliest smile? (*He sighs.*) Well, I shall have to leave it at that. If things don't pan out all right with this fellow, you'll come?

CECILY: No—no, at least—I can't promise.

BRUCE: You'll be along all right. (*Quietly as he crosses to the door.*)

CECILY: Good-bye.

BRUCE (*shaking his head, with a smile*): Au revoir.

He comes back impulsively as though to kiss her. She stands still but is quite prepared to smack his face if necessary. He pauses of his own volition and smiles.

BRUCE: No, I'll leave that till later.

He turns and exits quickly.

CECILY is left staring after him. When his personality has quite faded from the room she gives a little gasp.

CECILY: Well, really!

She turns away thoughtfully and drifts unconsciously to the dining-room door which is open—she looks up and catches sight of the picture and smiles ruminatively. She looks back at the door through which BRUCE has gone and then at the picture again. She shuts the dining-room door decisively.

CECILY: Oh, no, no, no! It's too silly!

She goes to the mantelpiece, takes the note and tears it into pieces. She crosses to the window.

CECILY: Damn! Rain!

She shuts the window, returns to the sofa, sits down firmly and repairs her face.

CECILY: Ah, well, that's that!

The phone bell rings.

CECILY (*answering it, kneeling on the sofa*): Hallo? Hallo? Yes? . . . Who? . . . Nigel! Where are you speaking

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

from? . . . Tilbury? . . . Only just what? . . . Oh, through the customs—good. How long will you be? . . . About an hour. Yes, dear, lovely. . . . Good-bye. Wait a moment, Nigel. Hallo? Hallo? . . . Listen, dear. . . . Something I must ask you now. . . . But I want to get it quite clear before you arrive. . . . You will postpone our wedding, won't you? . . . No, please, it's so much easier over the phone; if I wait till I see you it'll make it . . . No, it's not a mood, dear, I have thought very deeply . . . but I said it all in my last letter and I feel just the same. (*Her voice is becoming tremulous.*) Yes, I know, dear, it is horrid. . . . But it isn't entirely selfishness . . . I know things have been very difficult for you out there, but they've been pretty hard for me at the office, I . . . (*Something that he says turns her voice flat and toneless.*) Oh, I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry you feel like that about it . . . Is that your final word? . . . No, no, please don't say that. . . . (*She is in tears by now.*) Oh, it's loathsome hurting people like this. . . . One moment, Nigel. Listen, please . . . perhaps if we—— (*He has rung off.*) Nigel? Hallo? Nigel? Oh!

She crouches dejectedly on the sofa. She fumbles in her bag for a handkerchief. The clock strikes one. She looks up sharply—her thoughts on Bruce. The sun comes out and the room is flooded with light. Impulsively she runs to the window and flings it open, you can hear a barrel-organ playing Mendelssohn's "Spring Song." The whole room now is gay. She takes a deep breath and runs to the desk, she scrawls a note, sticks it down and puts it on the mantel-piece, grabs her hat and crams it on, and still pulling on her coat, hurries out of the room.

CURTAIN.

ACT ONE.

SCENE TWO

SCENE : *The same two and a half hours later.* -

NIGEL *is seated on the sofa, CECILY's note still in his hand. MAVIS is walking up and down.*

NIGEL *is what is known as a "typical Englishman." A neat, almost military head, clipped moustache, and the skin stretched tightly over a sharp-boned face. Fever has made his tan slightly jaundiced and has exaggerated the size of his dark eyes which, at the moment, are stricken and piteous.*

For a while there is silence.

NIGEL : I'm sorry to make such an ass of myself, but it's been a bit of a shock. I mean on top of the excitement of coming back—horrible !

MAVIS : I know.

NIGEL : I can't believe it. . . . Cecily. . . . What am I going to do, Mavis ? What *am* I going to do ? . . . I mean, it was everything, all my work . . . the whole reason.

MAVIS : What can I say ? How can I——

NIGEL : I was impatient with her on the phone. God, if I'd realised ! . . . What's the time now, three o'clock. I never dreamed it was as serious as this. (*He reads the note for the tenth time and laughs sharply and bitterly.*) "P.S.—Your ring has gone to the cleaners, you shall have it as soon as it comes back." She's thought of everything—hasn't she ?

MAVIS : If only she'd talked to me more about it, but she's been bottling it up inside her for weeks. It was only this morning, as I told you, that she really laid her cards on the table.

NIGEL (*reading*) : " I'm sorry I can't go through with it. Please don't wait for me—there's nothing to be gained by it. I'm terribly sorry, but one must be honest." It's this stinking, filthy money—God damn and blast it !

MAVIS (*half to herself*) : " The root of all evil," as Auntie Loo-Loo would say. Aren't some of these old cliches sickeningly right on occasions ? Like some frightful old bore saying, " I told you so," and talking of old bores, thank Heavens it was I who found you waiting outside instead of Auntie Loo-Loo.

She is talking for the sake of talk. He isn't listening.

NIGEL : What ?

MAVIS : Look here. Do you think it's wise to stay ? I mean, we've no idea when Cecily will be back.

NIGEL (*grimly*) : I'll wait—a week if necessary.

MAVIS : Auntie Loo-Loo is bound to be back before Cecily—it'll all have to be explained—it'll be ghastly for you.

NIGEL : Nothing can be worse than this. I'm going to wait and see her.

MAVIS : Really, I'm afraid . . .

NIGEL (*in an outburst*) : Good God ! What do you think I'm made of ? Do you think I'm going to sit back and do nothing ? No, by hell, I'm going to make a fight for it !

MAVIS (*in spite of herself*) : Ah, that's better.

NIGEL : All this time, out in that bloody place, I dreamed, lying there in a muck sweat, night after night, of to-day. God, it's funny, isn't it ? The things I've given up, for nothing—nothing.

MAVIS (*helplessly*) : Oh, Nigel !

ACT I.—SCENE II.

NIGEL : Sorry, Mavis. This is a poor show for you. Nothing so boring as somebody else's hard luck story. Don't you worry about me, old girl; you go out, it's a lovely day, at least it seemed it when I landed. . . . God ! To think it was less than three hours ago. I shall be all right, honestly.

MAVIS : Well, if you'd rather I left—— ?

NIGEL : Oh, no, no. It isn't that.

MAVIS : Then I'll stay.

NIGEL : It's damn good of you. But I'm not much fun this afternoon. Rather "the Wreck of the *Hesperus*," what ? Never mind, we'll get things straight, somehow. I shall be able to laugh her out of it—we've always had the same sense of humour. I can't see anything particularly funny in it at the moment, but I dare say it'll come.

AUNTIE LOO-LOO *is heard off stage*.

AUNTIE L. (off) : Children ! Children !

NIGEL : Oh, Lord ! Nothing funny about that !

AUNTIE LOO-LOO *bursts into the room. She concentrates on NIGEL, so does not notice CECILY's absence.*

AUNTIE L. : Nigel ! At last ! Let me take a good look at you. Oh, but how well you're looking ! Perhaps a teeny bit greyer round the temples, but it suits you, and what does a little grey hair matter when you're as happy as you are ? I never saw you looking so debonair and gay. And darling Cecily's been bubbling over with excitement, haven't you, Cec—— ? (*Looking round.*) Oh, but—but, where is she ? (*To the others*) I was so absorbed in you, Nigel, that I thought Mavis was Cecily, aren't I a silly ?

She laughs affectedly, then becomes aware of the stony faces of NIGEL and MAVIS.

But where *is* Cecily ?

Silence.

Is anything wrong ?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

MAVIS: Everything's wrong, Miss Garrard. Cecily's gone out. She wasn't here when Nigel arrived——

AUNTIE L.: Wasn't here when——?

MAVIS: She's broken off the engagement.

AUNTIE L.: Cecily? . . . I don't believe it.

For answer, NIGEL hands her CECILY'S note. AUNTIE

LOO-LOO *reads it with growing dismay.*

Oh, but she can't do it! She can't—where is she? I don't understand. Why on earth should she—I mean—why?

NIGEL (*more to himself than to her*): She wrote to me a couple of months ago asking me to postpone the wedding.

AUNTIE L.: *Postpone* the wedding. After all these years of waiting——?

NIGEL: Yes, that's just what I thought. She had some idea of enjoying her new fortune independently for a time. There was a lot of talk about freedom. I didn't really seem to count.

AUNTIE L.: What rubbish! The dear girl's been dancing all over the room this morning at the thought of you coming back!

MAVIS: We shan't help Nigel by deceiving him, Miss Garrard.

AUNTIE L.: I'm sure I shouldn't dream of——

MAVIS: The trouble is we've none of us taken her sufficiently seriously; we've noticed something, directly or indirectly, and we've thought that it would all turn out for the best in the end.

A thoughtful pause.

AUNTIE L.: And yet you know she hasn't talked about him . . . as far as I've been able to see, she hasn't had any letters from him, and I'm sure he hasn't phoned, at least not while I——

NIGEL: The other man—whoever he is.

ACT I.—SCENE II.

MAVIS : Oh, no, no, no. Of that I'm absolutely certain. There's no question of another man.

NIGEL : Are you sure ?

MAVIS : Positive.

AUNTIE L. : Fiddlesticks ! Don't tell me—why should any girl give up a man unless she is quite certain of another one ?

MAVIS (*to NIGEL*) : You can take it from me, quite definitely there isn't anybody else.

NIGEL : Then there may be some slight chance for——

AUNTIE L. : Of course there is ! She must be talked to, be made to see reason ; girls can't do things like that.—I mean, to write a note like this. (*She is reading it again.*) It's—it's unthinkable, and in any case, why hasn't her ring returned from the cleaners ? I went in yesterday most particularly and they promised it before twelve this morning without fail.

MAVIS *gives a stifled shriek of hysteria and buries her face in her hands.*

My dear Mavis, whatever's the matter with you.

CECILY *enters. She is looking flushed and her eyes are shining. She checks herself as she sees NIGEL.*

CECILY : Oh, Nigel ! I asked you not to wait, dear. It would have been so much better not to.

NIGEL : I had to.

CECILY : I'm so terribly sorry—I did so want to spare you this, but there's nothing you can do—*really* !

AUNTIE L. : How can you speak to the poor boy like that ? What a welcome ! All the way from the Sudan !

CECILY : Yes, I know. Nigel, I'm hating myself, but——

AUNTIE L. : If you won't kiss him, you might at least shake hands.

MAVIS : Don't you think, Miss Garrard, it would be better if we left them together for a bit.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY : No, no, Mavis, I'd rather you didn't go. I can only stay a moment. I've just come in for some thicker shoes.

AUNTIE L. : Thicker shoes ? What for ?

CECILY : It's better for us both if you don't go. If there was anything to do to make it easier I'd do it, but there isn't, Nigel. (CECILY's manner is changed—her calmness which is not at all callous, seems to be sustained by some inward light of happiness.)

NIGEL : Cecily, listen, you must let me say one word. If it really means so much to you, I'm willing to postpone the wedding.

AUNTIE L. : There now !

CECILY : I'm sorry, but it's too late.

NIGEL : You mean after what I said on the phone this morning ? I'm sorry, Cecily, but really——

CECILY : Oh, no, no. It was perfectly reasonable of you to be furious, it isn't because of that at all.

NIGEL : What then ?

CECILY (*at a loss*) : It's . . . it's just too late, that's all.

AUNTIE L. : Really, Cecily, how can you be so irritating. You can't go on saying "it's too late" like that.

CECILY (*impatiently*) : Please, Auntie Loo-Loo !

MAVIS : It's no good, Cecily. Auntie Loo-Loo's right—for once.

AUNTIE L. : What !!!

MAVIS : Nigel's given in most generously and you refuse to meet him—you must give him some reason.

AUNTIE L. : I should think so, indeed.

NIGEL : Is there another man ?

CECILY : There wasn't.

MAVIS : There *wasn't*.

CECILY : But there is now.

AUNTIE L. : I knew it all along.

ACT I.—SCENE II.

CECILY: There you're mistaken, Auntie Loo-Loo. I only met him this morning, after you and Mavis had gone out.

AUNTIE L.: But I don't understand—how——?

MAVIS: How could you possibly——?

CECILY: You spoke to him on the phone, Mavis.

MAVIS: *That* man?

AUNTIE L.: With the American accent. I *knew* those house-agents were untrustworthy.

NIGEL: How long did you say you've known him?

CECILY: Since this morning. Oh, I know it sounds silly, but——

NIGEL: Silly! How long was he here?

CECILY: Oh, I don't know. We talked . . . half an hour or so.

MAVIS: But d'you mean to say that this man——

NIGEL: Who you've only seen once for half an hour——?

CECILY: I've seen him again since he was here. I've just had lunch with him at the Savoy.

AUNTIE L.: Cecily, how could you? How *common*!

NIGEL: Had you met him when you spoke to me on the phone?

CECILY: Yes, he'd just gone.

NIGEL: And after the conversation you met him at the Savoy?

CECILY: Yes, by arrangement.

NIGEL: And this man is the reason why I'm too late?

CECILY: Yes.

NIGEL: You must have taken leave of your senses.

CECILY: That's exactly what I thought when—— Oh, but what's the use? I shall never be able to convince any of you that I'm not certifiably insane.

MAVIS: You haven't by any chance had too much to drink at the Savoy?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY : Look here, it's no good us going on like this, I simply must hurry.

AUNTIE L. : What do you want to change your shoes for ?

NIGEL : Who is the man, anyway ?

CECILY : His name's Bruce Lovell, he was born in England ; but he's travelled a lot, been away for years.

MAVIS : Is he good-looking ?

CECILY : I don't think so—I don't know.

NIGEL : Then what's the attraction ?

CECILY : If we start discussing the reasons for attraction we shall be here for the rest of our lives.

NIGEL : But you're not going to marry him ?

CECILY : He's asked me to.

NIGEL : Are you going to ?

CECILY : I might.

NIGEL : But how about this independence, this freedom that you've been on to me so much about.

CECILY : It'll be different with him.

NIGEL (*impatiently*) : Oh, really.

MAVIS : Why will it be different ?

CECILY : I shall never be able to make you understand. But—but, you see, he isn't tied down—he's a wanderer. We should perhaps spend part of the spring and summer in the country, but the rest of the year we should travel.

MAVIS : You seem to have got on remarkably quickly at the Savoy ? When are you seeing him again ?

CECILY : Well, if you must know he's waiting for me outside in a taxi. We're going down to Kew.

MAVIS : Ah ! "Kew in the spring." I see.

AUNTIE L. : So *that's* why you wanted to change your shoes.

NIGEL : The whole thing's too fantastic for words.

AUNTIE L. : Well, in any case, he won't be taking this flat.

ACT I.—SCENE II.

CECILY (*smiling*): No, Auntie Loo-Loo, I'm afraid not.

AUNTIE L.: Well, we must hope for the best. Thank heavens I've placed the flat in Harrod's hands now. They've promised to send some one along this afternoon.

NIGEL (*furiously*): What the hell does the flat matter, or anything else? This is my whole life smashed to bits! Isn't there anything we can do to stop her?

AUNTIE L.: I'm sure I don't know. You see Cecily's of age, but I've no influence with her, although I'm her only relation, but that seems to mean nothing nowadays.

NIGEL: It's too ludicrous to talk about marrying a man you've only just met.

CECILY: I shall certainly think it over for a little while. I may not marry him at all. But—oh, it's been so lovely giving way to an impulse. We're all impulsive at heart, but most of us never get the chance to indulge it.

MAVIS (*quietly*): Did *he* say that?

CECILY (*glancing at her sharply*): How did you know?

MAVIS (*facetiously*): My gipsy blood, dear.

NIGEL: Did he know that you'd won all this blasted money?

CECILY: Ah! I knew that was coming. Yes, I did tell him, but that has nothing to do with it. He's got plenty of his own—he made it in Canada.

MAVIS: Oh, "the wide open spaces"—of course that *would* get you in your present state.

AUNTIE L.: I think it's too disgraceful. Here have I been slaving myself to the bone all the morning—had a filthy lunch—and now——

NIGEL: Of all the damnably inconsiderate and selfish——

AUNTIE L.: Besides, think what people will say!

NIGEL: Oh, shut up! This is my business.

AUNTIE L.: Really, that's *no* way to talk!

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

The front door bell rings.

Ah, that'll be the person from Harrods. (*She hurries off stage.*)

MAVIS: They would send some one in the middle of all this, of course.

AUNTIE L. (*the soul of charm, off stage*): Oh do come in. I'm afraid we're all higgledy-piggledy, but still—you'll be able to get some idea—it really is quite a charming little flat. (*Coming in.*) (*Aside*): Such a nice man! Now this—this is the sitting-room!

BRUCE *enters*.

BRUCE (*to CECILY*): I'm awfully sorry. I got kind of tired waiting in the taxi. I thought something might have happened to you.

CECILY: Oh, Bruce, you shouldn't have——

AUNTIE L. (*puzzled*): Bruce?

MAVIS: Bruce Lovell?

BRUCE: That's me.

NIGEL: What the hell!

AUNTIE L.: But who——? D'you mean to say that——? I thought Harrods—— Ooooo!

BRUCE: I'm awfully sorry, but I didn't expect any one here.

AUNTIE L.: How dare you! How dare you set foot in this flat!

CECILY: Auntie Loo-Loo!

AUNTIE L.: Be quiet, Cecily! I must deal with this! (*To BRUCE*): I'd have you know that I am Cecily's only relation and as such her guardian, and I insist—I have the right to insist—upon an explanation.

BRUCE: An explanation of what—er—er—Miss Harrington?

AUNTIE L.: My name is Garrard. Here's this poor boy come all the way from the Sudan to find himself jilted—

ACT I.—SCENE II.

there's no other word for it—jilted, by my niece—and it's all your fault.

MAVIS : Please, Miss Garrard !

AUNTIE L. : It's no good, leave me alone and don't interfere ; I will have my say. (*To BRUCE*) : Who are you ? What are you ? Who are your people ? The only Lovells I ever knew were the Shropshire Lovells who drank !—

BRUCE (*quietly and ruefully to CECILY*) : And I only had a lager for lunch.

CECILY (*to MAVIS*) : Really, this is too much. Mavis, take her away !

AUNTIE L. (*overbearing*) : Cecily ! How could you be so ungrateful ?

BRUCE : Miss Garrard, please believe me, I do understand your anxiety.

AUNTIE L. : Hold your tongue—if there's anything to be said it's for——

NIGEL : If there's anything to be said I think I'd better say it.

MAVIS : Nigel's quite right, Miss Garrard, it would be much better if we went. We'll go for a little walk.

AUNTIE L. Walk ! After I've been dragged into this revolting scene ?

MAVIS : Very well, then, we'll take a taxi and go and have tea somewhere.

AUNTIE L. (*considering*) : Well——

CECILY : Please, Auntie Loo-Loo.

AUNTIE L. : Very well then, but under protest. You've disgraced your mother's name. If your poor dear father had been alive things might have been very different. However, I've done my best—one can't do more. " Picked up " and taken out to lunch—on your own head be it !

She exits.

MAVIS (*advancing a step or two back into the room*) : All

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

I've got to say, Cecily, is that—— (*She pauses confronting BRUCE and looking at him with no apparent friendliness.*) But, no, perhaps this isn't the moment.

MAVIS *exits*.

NIGEL: Well, thank God she's got rid of your aunt.

Re-enter AUNTIE LOO-LOO, annoyed at spoiling her exit.

AUNTIE L.: My bag!

Exit.

NIGEL (*coming up to BRUCE*): Now, look here, Lovell, you've gathered by now, if you didn't know before, who I am.

BRUCE: I have and I want to tell you here and now that I'm sorry—not sorry for what I've done, but because I realise that you must be feeling pretty sore.

NIGEL: You know, do you, that we've been engaged for a long time?

BRUCE: Too long a time. She was asking you to postpone the wedding before she met me.

CECILY: You know that's true, Nigel.

NIGEL: Yes, but now I've agreed to the postponement.

CECILY: But you see—since then——

BRUCE: See here, this discussion isn't going to do anybody any good—except the taxi-driver ticking up outside.

NIGEL: You can say what you like, I'm going to have this out here and now.

BRUCE: It rests between you and Cecily. My position, to say the least of it, is embarrassing. We'd arranged to go to Kew and as far as I'm concerned it's still on. How about you, Cecily?

CECILY: Yes.

BRUCE: I admit you're entitled to your say. I'm darned if I'm going to sit in that draughty taxi any longer, so if you'll excuse me, I'll go and wait in the dining-room—

ACT I.—SCENE II.

there's a picture there that rather fascinates me. (*He exits into dining-room.*)

NIGEL (*frantically*): For God's sake, Cecily—you can't do this. You haven't given me a proper chance. Think what you're doing!

CECILY (*with quiet sincerity*): My dear, I have thought—I've thought of nothing else for weeks.

NIGEL: Oh, you take it all so calmly. I suppose a woman gets a kick out of a couple of men fighting over her.

CECILY: Nigel! What's the use of talking like that!

NIGEL (*pacing up and down recovering himself*): But think, Cecily, think how well we've always got on together—the grand times we've had—the understanding—we've been so terribly fond of each other.

CECILY: But, Nigel, I still *am* fond of you. My feelings haven't changed for you, it's just that I've found out they're not strong enough.

NIGEL: I see exactly what has happened. I've been a "standby"—an escape from your office; now you've got your money you don't need me.

CECILY: That's not true. I thought for one awful moment this morning that it might be, but I know now my feelings for you were—and are—perfectly genuine; it's just that something stronger has come into my life. I may have lost my head—it may come to nothing—but there it is.

There is a thoughtful pause, finally broken by NIGEL.

NIGEL: I'm not going to bother you any more now, Cecily. I don't say I shan't try to influence you during the next few weeks—I shall, I shall do my damndest, but I can see it's no use at the moment; besides, I only lose my head and say bitter things, and I can't bear doing that because, whatever happens, whatever you may do, I love you with all my heart—and I always shall. I mean that, don't forget. *He exits.*

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY *watches him, genuinely moved.*

She goes to the dining-room door and opens it, and returns and sits.

BRUCE *enters, he watches for a second as he closes the door.*

BRUCE: I'm afraid it's been a bit tough for you—I'm sorry. *(He takes a closer look at her and hands her his handkerchief.)*

CECILY *(with a half-hysterical laugh)*: Thanks. I've got my own. *(She produces it and blows her nose.)*

BRUCE *(moving over to the window)*: Don't you worry, my dear—I'll make it up to you good and plenty if you give me the chance.

CECILY *(rising—quite recovered)*: Come on—let's go to Kew.

BRUCE: We shall have to hurry if we're to get any time there.

CECILY: Right! I'll just change my shoes. I won't be a moment. *(She exits into bedroom.)*

BRUCE *walks up and down humming the "Merry Widow" to himself, looking at the floor. He breaks off in the middle of a bar, his attention riveted by a piece of old newspaper lying at the bottom of a small drawer. He kneels, snatches up the paper and peruses it intently.*

CECILY *enters. He jumps up and swings round, the paper crumpled behind his back.*

CECILY *(casually)*: Hallo? What were you doing?

BRUCE: Just fastening my shoe-lace. Shall we go?

They move across to the door, BRUCE keeping the paper behind his back. He opens the door for her and she goes out ahead of him. BRUCE, left behind for a second, pauses, considering what to do with the crumpled paper, then thrusts it swiftly into his coat pocket and follows her.

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

SCENE: About 11 o'clock on a sunny April morning. The interior of a very charming country cottage. The room is timbered, but it is not tiresomely "ye olde," and you don't bang your head if you wish to stand upright. Through the French windows is a glimpse of an enchanting garden.

The cottage is, in fact, a converted inn. To one side is a rather "quaint" staircase leading down to a cellar. Another staircase leads upstairs. A door up two steps leads to the kitchen and the front door opens straight into the garden.

The room is in the middle of being "put straight." The trunk which we have seen in Cecily's flat is there, and there is a pair of steps standing near one of the windows which at the moment has only one curtain. There is a low settee with its end resting against the fireplace. A japanned tropical box is in front of table L. Curtains of French windows drawn.

The curtain rises on an empty stage. BRUCE and CECILY can be heard outside the front door, talking and laughing.

There is the sound of a key in the lock. CECILY enters and puts the key on the inside of the door.

BRUCE is seen in the doorway.

BRUCE (*calling off*): Donald! Donald! Donald! Say, that's a darn silly name for a dog.

DON, *an extremely attractive spaniel, enters.*

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY : We can call him "Don" for short. Come along, Don, good dog ! I'll show him his kennel. (*She exits to kitchen.*)

BRUCE *draws back the curtains and opens the French windows.*

CECILY *returns.*

CECILY : Oh, isn't it heavenly. (*She joins BRUCE at the window.*)

They embrace passionately.

The peace !

BRUCE : What did I tell you ?

CECILY : Yes, I know—it was only that I thought it might be a bit inaccessible.

BRUCE : Well, isn't it worth it ? Not to have neighbours with their chickens and wireless sets and . . .

CECILY : Of course it is. As long as you don't complain when you have to walk three miles to buy a packet of cigarettes.

BRUCE : Even that will be worth it.

CECILY : I shall never let you leave me for a minute. Don't you think we're silly not to have the telephone ?

BRUCE : Of course not. That's the whole point of living in the country—no telephones, no cars—the Simple Life.

CECILY : Yes ; and in any case, I've got Don for protection.

BRUCE : And me ! Do you know what to-day is ?

CECILY : Yes, Tuesday.

BRUCE : No, don't be silly—don't you realise—

CECILY : Darling, of course. (*She kisses him again.*)

They both laugh.

BRUCE : Do you remember saying these things don't happen ?

CECILY : It seems incredible, doesn't it, that it was only six weeks ago.

ACT II.—SCENE I.

BRUCE: Since then we've been married, we've had this glorious honeymoon, we've found our cottage, and here we are.

CECILY: Of course, Auntie Loo-Loo would say I had thrown myself at your head!

BRUCE: And Auntie Loo-Loo would be quite wrong. You know perfectly well if I'd had my way, I'd have married you that afternoon, instead of going to Kew.

CECILY: Yes, I do believe you would.

BRUCE: I certainly would. (*Noticing japed box*): Ah, hell! I didn't know I'd left this up here, yesterday. I'll take it down to the dark-room.

CECILY: Cellar, dear.

BRUCE: It's going to be my dark-room, so it may as well get used to being called it.

CECILY: What's in it, dear?

BRUCE: Just a lot of my photographic junk. One moment, there's something in here I've been meaning to give you.

CECILY: What is it?

BRUCE *produces a Chinese shawl*.

Where did you get it?

BRUCE: Oh, from a man—in Hankow, I think it was.

CECILY: It's perfectly lovely, darling—thank you.

BRUCE (*looking out*): Aah! The estate.

CECILY: Garden, dear.

BRUCE: Oh, no, there's an orchard as well—it's an estate.

CECILY: I do wish I didn't keep worrying about the price, dear. You don't think one thousand five hundred pounds was too much for it?

BRUCE (*quite casually*): Lord, no! Think of the awful places we looked at, at twice the price.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY : It was the nicest way of spending our honeymoon, wasn't it ?

BRUCE : I was afraid you might be disappointed at not going abroad at once.

CECILY : No, I think it's a lovely idea going away when the summer's over.

BRUCE : Yes, that lane would be pretty impassable in the winter, I should think. Oh, my dear, the places I'll show you. . . . Oh, there's that old man the agent told us about—he's working to-day.

CECILY (*having finished the curtain*) : Oh, yes, Hodgson. (*She joins BRUCE at the window.*) He's evidently got over his "rheumatics." Who's that girl with him, I wonder ?

BRUCE : Do gardeners usually bring their girl-friends with them ?

CECILY : I'm sure I don't know. (*Calling out of the window*) : Good-morning, Hodgson !

HODGSON (*off*) : Good-morning, mum !

CECILY (*moving away from the window and speaking urgently*) : He's coming in. Do you know anything about gardening ?

BRUCE : Not much, do you ?

CECILY : Not a thing—we shall have to pretend to be experts.

HODGSON *appears in the window. He is an elderly man, with a funny, direct manner, very matter-of-fact. He is an intensely real person, not at all a piece of theatrical "Mummerset."*

HODGSON : Good-morning, mum. Good-morning, sir. Sorry to have been away when you've been here before, but my rheumatics have been that bad and old Doctor Gribble said I wasn't to do any work for a few days.

CECILY : Yes, the agent told us.

HODGSON : So I'll make up for lost time now, if you're agreeable. I've always looked after this garden. Mr.

ACT II.—SCENE I.

DUNNING, what was here before, kept me on even when the house was empty.

BRUCE : Yes, we've had very good accounts of you.

HODGSON : Then, I can stay on ?

CECILY : Yes, please, Hodgson.

HODGSON : I was wondering if you'd be wanting some one to look after the house, like.

CECILY : Well, as a matter of fact, we haven't fixed any one yet.

HODGSON : Because there's my niece—Ethel, she hasn't been in service before, but she's a good girl. I brought her along with me in case you would like to see her.

CECILY : Thank you very much, Hodgson, ask her to come in.

HODGSON (*calling from the window*) : Ethel ! Come 'ere !
(*To CECILY*) : She's not very smart, mum, but she's had good schooling—piano lessons and all—and she's willing—

BRUCE (*to CECILY*) : Well, you'd be able to—er—coach her.

CECILY : Train her, dear—yes, quite possibly.

ETHEL *enters* ; *she is not particularly bright, and is very untidy, but she looks clean and grins a great deal.*

Good-morning, Ethel.

ETHEL : Good-morning, miss—er—(*she sees BRUCE*)—mum.

There is a pause.

CECILY : Your uncle tells me you might—er—that you want to go into service.

ETHEL : That's right. You see, mum doesn't want me at 'ome any more 'cos my sister Nellie's left school now and there's no need for the two of us. . . .

CECILY : Well, would you like to come and work here ?

ETHEL : Yes, please—mum—if you don't mind. I've

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

always done lots of housework at 'ome like, so I'm used to it.

CECILY : Can you cook ?

ETHEL : I can make nice milk puddin's and stews, and dumplin's and things, but nothing fancy.

CECILY : Yes—well, I think we might get on very well. Now, what wages would you—er—— ?

HODGSON : Well, we'll leave that to you, miss.

CECILY : When can you start ?

ETHEL (*promptly taking off her coat*) : Now ! Only I 'aven't got an apron on.

HODGSON : 'Ere, you must tell the lady what yer mother said.

CECILY : What was that ?

ETHEL : Well, if you please, mum, mother said I wasn't to sleep in, because, you see, she's all . . .

HODGSON : On account of leaving her mum alone. But she could stay as late as you like, mum.

CECILY : Very well then, that'll be all right. Perhaps you could start straightening up the kitchen.

ETHEL : Oh, yes, mum, I could do that. (*Makes a dive towards the kitchen.*)

CECILY : Oh, these steps, we've finished with them.

ETHEL *dives back to steps and exits with them into the kitchen.*

BRUCE : Well, she's got energy, anyway.

HODGSON : Oh, she's not a bad girl. They've never 'ad a maid sleep in, not all the time I've been working 'ere—since Mr. Dunning converted the place before the war.

CECILY : Converted it from what ?

HODGSON : Well, it used to be an inn about fifty years ago.

CECILY : Really ? How exciting.

HODGSON : This 'ere grass track used to be a road—

ACT II.—SCENE I.

been 'ere since Roman times, they do say, but when they built the new road it fell out of use—became overgrown, like. I don't know, a little bit of grass wouldn't keep me away from no pub.

They all laugh.

Well, I'll be getting on with my job. You can see the weeds growing this spring weather—proper growing weather it be. *(He exits.)*

CECILY *(calling after him)*: Will you pick some of that lilac—the white and the mauve.

HODGSON *(off)*: Very good, mum.

CECILY: Now, really, we must get this room a bit straight—it looks awful without any books or flowers. I'll get that trunk unpacked. *(She opens the trunk and takes out two cushions, which she puts at each end of the sofa.)* There! That's better already. We needn't have fresh covers for them if we're going away, we can have them new next year.

BRUCE: There's a careful girl. Oh, yes, before you do anything else, dear, I shall want your signature to a couple of papers.

CECILY: What are they?

BRUCE: Just the last bit of legal tomfoolery in connection with the purchase of this place.

CECILY: The law does require a lot of fiddling formalities, doesn't it?

BRUCE: Yes, I'm sorry you've been bothered with it all. Once the bank puts my draft through—God knows what all the delay's about—

CECILY: Oh, my dear, you know I don't mind. *(Taking papers)*: Where? Here?

BRUCE *(handing her a fountain-pen)*: Yes. Aren't you going to read it?

CECILY: Do you mind if I don't?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

BRUCE : Not if you don't want to, you unbusiness-like girl.

CECILY : My dear, I used to be business-like—do I have to put the date ?

BRUCE : Yes.

CECILY : Far too business-like.

BRUCE : And here.

CECILY : I'm doing my best to forget all that now.

BRUCE : Are you succeeding ?

CECILY : What do you think ?

BRUCE (*taking her in his arms*) : I think that this is just about the most wonderful moment of my life—you and I in our little house—alone——

AUNTIE LOO-LOO's *head appears round the door.*

AUNTIE L. : Aha ! I've caught you !

They start violently and break apart.

CECILY : Auntie Loo-Loo !

AUNTIE L. : Just a little surprise, my dear ! I've been meaning to come ever since I got your letter to tell me that you'd found this little nest. Then I discovered that to-day there was a cheap ticket. (*As she kisses CECILY*) : I'm afraid my nose is rather cold. Cecily ! How well you're looking—radiant ! Aren't you proud of her—er—Bruce ?

BRUCE : You bet your life !

AUNTIE L. : Yes, only nine shillings return, and such a comfortable train—a corridor. But, I must say I think that seven and six is an exorbitant charge for the taxi from the station, nearly as much as the whole distance from London—a scandal ! Isn't there any one one could write to ?

BRUCE : No one, I'm afraid—except the driver.

AUNTIE L. : Oh, but he's coming to fetch me. If I don't catch the three-fifteen, I shall have to pay another eight and tenpence on my ticket and that would never do !

ACT II.—SCENE I.

CECILY : Well, do sit down, you must be tired after that journey.

AUNTIE L. : Oh, no, I'm *never* tired—and then, I've got the most wonderful maid for you—she's a Plymouth Sister, I'm afraid, but perhaps that's all to the good these days—at least, you know what you're getting.

ETHEL *enters*.

ETHEL : Look ! Here's a whopping big parcel. Carrier just left it—feels like books ! (*She dumps a large parcel on the floor.*)

CECILY : Thank you, Ethel. Oh, just take that box down to the cellar, will you ?

BRUCE : No, my dear, I'll see to that. I don't want any one nosing down there. Let's have it quite clear—it's going to be my private sanctum.

CECILY : Very well. That's all right, Ethel, you can go.

ETHEL *exits*.

CECILY *begins to unpack the books*.

AUNTIE LOO-LOO's eyes are on stalks as she watches

ETHEL out of the room. She turns inquiringly to

CECILY.

CECILY : It's awfully kind of you, Auntie Loo-Loo, but you see, I've just engaged that girl.

AUNTIE L. : Are you sure you're wise ? Have you taken up her references ?

CECILY : Oh, that's quite all right—she's the gardener's niece.

AUNTIE L. : That may be what he calls her.

BRUCE (*opening the parcel of books*) : It's hard to imagine her anything else.

AUNTIE L. (*darkly*) : One never knows—these village girls. It's all very fine, *now*—but when the evenings start lengthening.

BRUCE : Those are the books from Mudies.

L.S.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY (*looking at one of the books*): What a ghastly picture! Really, Bruce, how can you read these horrible books? (*She shows the photograph to AUNTIE L.*)

AUNTIE L. (*reading*): "Actual photograph of the remains of——" Oh! How revolting! Before lunch too. Are there any more?

CECILY: What do you think of the house?

AUNTIE L.: Oh, charming! charming! ideal—so quaint and picturesque—quite the little cottage o' dreams—have you had it surveyed?

BRUCE: Oh, that's all right, Miss Garrard, I've had a pretty good look over it—I know something about these things.

AUNTIE L.: Oh, yes, Canada! Well, it certainly has a most delightful atmosphere.

CECILY: That's just what I was saying.

AUNTIE L.: You're sure there isn't any dry-rot?

CECILY: I haven't seen any.

AUNTIE L.: You don't *see* dry-rot, my dear, it just goes on and on secretly for years and years until, finally, the whole place collapses on you.

BRUCE: It'll probably happen on my bath night!

AUNTIE L.: So you have a bath?

BRUCE: Of course, and plenty of water.

AUNTIE L.: I'm glad you've got a bath. (*Confidentially to CECILY*): I noticed at the bottom of the garden . . . so inconvenient on wet nights.

BRUCE (*overhearing*): No, that's the tool-shed.

AUNTIE L. (*embarrassed*): Oh—er—well, I mustn't stay here doing nothing, I must earn my lunch. Let me help with that trunk.

BRUCE *takes the books over to the bookcase.* CECILY and AUNTIE L. *go to the trunk.*

ETHEL *enters.*

ACT II.—SCENE I.

ETHEL : That china cupboard's bung full, miss. What shall I do with the rest ?

CECILY : I'll come and give you a hand.

AUNTIE L. : Shall I—— ?

CECILY : No, it's all right, Auntie Loo-Loo, Ethel and I can manage.

AUNTIE L. : Yes, it does look a little small for three.

AUNTIE L. *opens the box and takes out an album.*

BRUCE *hurries across and snatches it from her.*

BRUCE : Excuse me, Miss Garrard !

AUNTIE L. : Oh ! Something I oughtn't to have seen ?

BRUCE : No, not exactly that.

AUNTIE L. : I believe it was. That pretty girl in the lovely shawl.

BRUCE : That was my sister.

AUNTIE L. : You needn't worry, my dear boy—I'm a woman of the world. Let me help you unpack it.

BRUCE : I can manage it myself. Thanks all the same. It's just my photography, I'll get it out of the way.

AUNTIE L. : You must look out for black beetles in that cellar. (*She wanders to the table behind the sofa and spots the shawl.*)

CECILY *enters.*

CECILY : Really, you know——

AUNTIE L. : Where did this come from, Cecily ?

CECILY : Oh, yes, isn't it lovely. Bruce has just given it to me.

AUNTIE L. : Oh, has he ?

CECILY : We've had to put the rest of the china on the top shelf of the larder.

AUNTIE L. : I hope you haven't bought a pig in a poke, dear. What did you pay for it ?

CECILY : Fifteen hundred.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

AUNTIE L. : That seems a great deal to me.

BRUCE *re-enters*.

BRUCE : That cellar's going to make the best dark-room I've ever had. There'll be a day's work down there clearing it up.

AUNTIE L. : I've just been admiring the lovely shawl you've given Cecily.

BRUCE : Is this your book, Miss Garrard ?

They both giggle, he because he is slightly hysterical, and she in conventional good-humour.

AUNTIE L. : Oh, yes, of course ! Such a good book. *Every Day in My Garden*. I brought it down for you both. I got it at the bookstall—seven and six, reduced to a shilling. We'll look at it later. (*She returns to the trunk and dives into it.*) This is quite like the bran-tub at a bazaar ! (To CECILY) : What have you got, Cecily, dear ?

CECILY (*she is also undoing a parcel*) : Oh, look ! Here are my candlesticks. Here's the other one. (*She unwraps it and sees that it is broken.*) Oh !

AUNTIE L. (*having thought of a way out*) : Those wretched moving men !

HODGSON *enters through the French window with a bunch of lilac.*

HODGSON : The lilocks, mum.

CECILY : Thank you, Hodgson. (*She calls into kitchen.*) Ethel ! fill that vase with water, will you ? (To HODGSON) : How perfectly lovely. Look, Auntie Loo-Loo—out of the garden.

AUNTIE L. : Just fancy ! Nothing to pay. So this is your gardener, is it ?

HODGSON : That's right, mum.

Enter ETHEL with vase. Exit.

AUNTIE L. : I think this book might be of use to him—*Every Day in My Garden*. There's a calendar which tells you

ACT II.—SCENE I.

the work to be done every day in the year. Now let's see what it says for April.

HODGSON (*starting to go*): I've managed this garden for thirty years without books. (*He ambles off into the garden.*)

AUNTIE L. (*not noticing his exit*): We must move with the times. Besides, this is different. (*Searching in the book.*) Now, what's to-day? Ah, yes, here we are. (*Reading*): "Sow zinnias in pots—keep at a temperature of sixty degrees. Now is the time to mulch—" "Mulch?" What a funny word. "To mulch with newly rotted—er—manure—" (*She looks up.*) He's gone. Where is he? I hope I didn't embarrass him. He must hear this. Wait a moment, gardener.

She exits.

BRUCE and CECILY *do their best to stifle their laughter.*

BRUCE: Well, that was a nasty shock, wasn't it?

CECILY: I'm so sorry, dear, she meant it kindly.

BRUCE: Yes, of course, but—er—as long as she doesn't make a habit of it.

CECILY: I'll see she doesn't do that.

BRUCE: I resent anybody that stops me being alone with you—and when it's Auntie Loo-Loo—

CECILY: Don't say that or she'll come back. (*She goes to the window, looks out, and begins to laugh.*) It's all right; she's chasing Hodgson up and down the herbaceous border.

BRUCE, *standing behind her, kisses the nape of her neck.* Perhaps he'll brain her with the spade.

BRUCE *moves away towards the cellar stairs.*

You can see he's not listening to her even from this distance. She's cornered him now! (*She laughs again.*) You simply must come and watch this, she's . . . (*She looks at BRUCE and sees that he has reeled and clutched at the post of the staircase. She runs to him.*) Darling! What is it?

BRUCE: Nothing, nothing! I'm all right now.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY: But what—what was it?

BRUCE: I just felt giddy for a moment, that's all. It's nothing! Perhaps it was seeing Auntie Loo-Loo suddenly like that.

CECILY: Come and sit down, darling. (*She leads him to the sofa.*) Sit down and rest. I think I'd better send for the doctor.

BRUCE: No, no, no! I don't want a doctor—I'm quite all right now.

CECILY: But, darling——

BRUCE (*emphatically*): I don't want a doctor.

CECILY: I'll get you a glass of water.

BRUCE: No.

CECILY: Is there anything I can get you? Is there anything you'd like.

BRUCE: Yes.

CECILY: What?

BRUCE: I'd like you to come and sit by me.

CECILY (*doing so*): You're sure you're feeling better?

BRUCE (*with his head on her shoulder*): I'm perfectly all right now—as long as you don't go away.

CECILY: Of course I won't.

BRUCE (*with his eyes closed*): Oh, this is heaven—at least, it will be at three-fifteen.

CECILY: Why three-fifteen?

BRUCE: When Auntie Loo-Loo's train leaves.

They laugh.

CECILY: But, really, it is perfect, isn't it?

BRUCE: Very nearly?

CECILY: Only very nearly?

BRUCE: I mean that it's still growing. (*Merges into English.*) It'll go on until it reaches absolute perfection—and then——

CECILY: And then?

ACT II.—SCENE I.

BRUCE (*raising his head from her shoulder and taking her in his arms*): And then—my darling—my precious—then you'll see how wonderful it will be.

CECILY: Darling, do you know you said that quite like an Englishman?

BRUCE: Did I?

As he kisses her the CURTAIN falls.

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ACT TWO

SCENE TWO

SCENE: The same. Early in September. It is a very fine afternoon.

As the curtain rises ETHEL is descending the two step from the kitchen door with the tea-tray. She puts it down on a table and goes to the French windows.

ETHEL (yelling): Tea! (Then in a quiet afterthought): Mum . . . Mrs. Lovell. . . . Te-ea!

There is apparently no response. ETHEL fetches rather a heavy brass bell and rings it deafeningly at the garden.

BRUCE appears, ascending from the cellar. His appearance and manner are slightly changed from the first time we saw him. Quite definitely he doesn't look nearly as well, he has lost a lot of that easy buoyancy, and now phases of abstraction, not at all melancholy, however, alternate with a tinge of suppressed elation.

ETHEL stops ringing and turns. She gives a startled scream on seeing BRUCE.

Law, Mr. Lovell, you fair gave me a turn!

BRUCE (chuckling quietly): Did I?

ETHEL: Tea's ready.

BRUCE: I'd gathered that. You are a clever girl to have learnt to cut such thin bread-and-butter. D'you remember those awful hunks you used to give us three months ago?

ETHEL: They don't care for it like that at 'ome.

ACT II.—SCENE II.

BRUCE: I dare say not. Look, here's that snap I took last week of you and Prince.

ETHEL: Oh, sir—that's fine!

BRUCE: Yes, I think it's rather good—of the dog.

ETHEL (*taking him seriously*): Oh!

BRUCE: I'll let you have some to distribute amongst your many admirers.

ETHEL: Oh, Mr. Lovell!

ETHEL *exits*.

BRUCE *sits in the arm-chair, produces his notebook and starts looking through it.*

CECILY *comes in from the garden, removing her gardening gloves. She goes quietly to the back of BRUCE's chair and looks over his shoulder at the notebook.*

CECILY: And what has our Mr. Pepys got in his diary for to-day?

BRUCE *seems to have been aware of her approach. He laughs.*

BRUCE: Wouldn't you like to know!

CECILY: What's H_2O_2 mean? It's the only thing you've got down for to-day. What is H_2O_2 ?

BRUCE: Only a chemical I'm going to use in my new developer.

CECILY: Oh, your nasty old photography. Did you have a nice rest?

BRUCE (*like a schoolboy who has been found out*): Well, I—er—that is to say, I—

CECILY: Bruce! I don't believe you had a rest at all!

He shakes his head guiltily.

Oh, Bruce—you promised me! What did you do?

He points down towards the cellar.

Now, that really is very naughty of you. You've got plenty of time to fiddle about in that dark room.

BRUCE: I'm sorry, sweetheart, but I just felt restless.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY: I can't be angry with you, my angel, but you know how worried I am about you. If only you'd see a doctor!

BRUCE: And have him popping in and out of the house every day of the week—not on your life!

CECILY: He need only come once—just a little advice.

BRUCE: Darling, don't let's go over all that again. I'm perfectly all right, honestly.

CECILY: You don't look all right. You haven't looked all right since that attack you had when we came here—and you're looking worse.

BRUCE: It's been a very hot summer.

CECILY: Yes, but you've been used to all sorts of climates. If only we knew what it was.

BRUCE: Don't you worry, my dear. I know my own health. I'm as fit as a fiddle. It's just that my circulation gets a bit out of order sometimes. It's happened before.

CECILY: When?

BRUCE (*vaguely*): Oh, at—er—various intervals. Darling, the tea's getting stewed.

CECILY: You aren't worried about anything, are you?

BRUCE: Lord, no. Do I seem worried?

CECILY: No . . . no, just a little bit absentminded at moments.

BRUCE (*smiling to himself*): Fancy . . . ! I wasn't aware of it.

CECILY: It's only because I love you so that I fuss sometimes. It's funny, being jealous of some one's thoughts; but I suppose all lovers feel like that. Haven't you noticed how people who love each other often say, "What are you thinking of, dearest?"

BRUCE: It always strikes me as rather an irritating question.

CECILY: Exactly—that's why I never ask *you*.

ACT II.—SCENE II.

BRUCE (*smiling cryptically*): Perhaps it's just as well.

CECILY: Oh, why?

BRUCE (*kissing her*): Silly! I was only teasing.

CECILY: I wonder if this place really agrees with you?

BRUCE: Well, if it doesn't we shall be clearing out by the end of the month.

CECILY: It seems almost a pity, doesn't it?

BRUCE: What does?

CECILY: Leaving here when we've got things so nice.

BRUCE: But I thought you were always so anxious to travel?

CECILY: So I was—so I am—I'm fearfully excited—in a way. But it seems as though we've only just settled in.

BRUCE: Aha! Settled in! Where's that spirit of adventure we've heard so much about?

CECILY: It's still there all right, but I wish one could be in two places at once. I shall be so sorry to miss the dahlias—they're going to be lovely—and I do so love little pigs—we shall be gone before Penelope has her litter.

BRUCE: Well, she'll have some more; she's an attractive girl.

CECILY: I do hope Ethel will keep the place properly till we come back—light the fires once a week, and all that. Have you decided yet where we're to go first?

BRUCE: As a matter of fact, I had an idea while you were in the garden.

CECILY: What is it?

BRUCE: How about having our passports viséd for everywhere, and not deciding on anything until we get to the station. We shall be travelling light.

CECILY. Yes, why not? It's rather a good idea.

BRUCE: All right. Let's do that.

CECILY: You do think of the loveliest things.

BRUCE: Ah, I'm inspired by you, my angel.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

He draws her to him. They draw apart at the click of the latch as ETHEL enters carrying letters in her hand. As she comes to CECILY she checks herself and goes off stage again and returns with letters on a tray.

ETHEL: The post, Mum.

There is one for CECILY, three for BRUCE.

BRUCE: I always thought postmen delivered letters at the front door.

ETHEL (*with infinite meaning*): Not this one doesn't, Mr. Lovell.

Exit.

BRUCE (*opening a letter*): Oh, a bill! (*He opens another.*) Bill! (*He opens the long envelope.*) Oh, hum! (*He is lying.*) My solicitors say I shall be able to touch my capital soon. I hope to goodness it's before we go away. Who's your letter from?

CECILY: Mavis.

BRUCE (*with a touch of coldness*): Oh! (*Pause.*) What does she say?

CECILY: She wants to be friends. She wants to make it up.

BRUCE: But you haven't quarrelled with her?

CECILY: Well, not really, but . . . well, you and she didn't hit it off very well, did you?

BRUCE: I've never cared much for the bitter humour of a suppressed virgin.

CECILY: She isn't a virgin.

BRUCE: You surprise me.

CECILY: Anyway, she's holding out the olive branch. She wants to come down for the day.

BRUCE: When?

CECILY: Well, I don't know, but I should like her to see the garden before everything's over.

BRUCE: Do we really want people butting in?

ACT II.—SCENE II.

CECILY: In any case, she can't come down often, can she?

BRUCE: Oh, yes, of course, I'd forgotten. (*With a change to a more affable manner*): Yes . . . you'd want, in any case, to say good-bye. Well, supposing she comes down for the day on—let me see. (*He produces his notebook.*) Twentieth . . . twenty-first. . . . Ask her for the twenty-fifth, it's a Friday—that's a fortnight to-morrow. We shall be leaving on the Saturday. (*He makes a note.*) I say, she won't want to see us off, will she? I can't bear being "seen off."

CECILY: Neither can I—those dreadful conversations on the platform—fidgeting in front of the carriage window.

BRUCE: We must keep Auntie Loo-Loo away somehow.

CECILY: Oh, I don't think she'll attempt that. You squashed her pretty heavily last time she was here.

BRUCE: O.K., then ask Mavis for the twenty-fifth—but only for the day, mind.

CECILY: Thank you, darling—it'll be nice to have the atmosphere a little friendlier. (*A pause.*) She says something here about Nigel.

BRUCE: Oh, you're not going to ask *him*?

CECILY: Mavis seems to think that it's the idea that he can't see me that's upsetting him so much, and that perhaps if we met again in a friendly spirit he might be——

BRUCE: That's all baloney.

CECILY: Oh, well, all right. . . . You funny old thing, I believe you're jealous.

BRUCE: Maybe I am.

CECILY (*going to him and putting her arms round him*): You darling old stupid.

He kisses her passionately. He raises his head suddenly, listening.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

BRUCE: There's a car stopped at the end of the lane.

CECILY (*nervously*): Oh . . . oh, yes, I'd forgotten.

BRUCE: What?

CECILY: Darling, promise me you won't be angry?

BRUCE: What about?

CECILY: It's only because I was so anxious.

BRUCE: Come on, honey, spill it.

CECILY: I sent a message this morning when you were out.

BRUCE: A message?

CECILY: To Doctor Gribble.

BRUCE (*in sudden fury*): God damn it! Why did you do that?

CECILY: Bruce, darling, please!

BRUCE: I've told you again and again I hate and detest doctors . . . lot of blasted quacks.

CECILY: I couldn't help it, Bruce, I was so anxious.

BRUCE: I won't have people interfering and fussing around here.

CECILY: He won't, dear, I'm sure. He's very well thought of in the village.

BRUCE: What do *they* know? Pack of half-baked yokels.

CECILY: You will see him, dear . . . just to please me?

BRUCE: Well, I don't see how I can very well turn him out of the house.

There is a sound of a dog barking.

CECILY: Here he is.

She goes to the front door and opens it.

DR. G. (*off stage*): Ah—Mrs. Lovell?

CECILY: Yes. Good-afternoon, doctor.

DR. GRIBBLE *enters*. *He is about sixty, a man of intense charm and sweetness of manner; even BRUCE, with his antipathy to doctors, succumbs at once.*

ACT II.—SCENE II.

DR. G.: Well, well, you *are* hidden away here, aren't you?

CECILY: This is my husband, Dr. Gribble.

DR. G.: How do you do? . . . Yes, I've only been up this lane two or three times in my life.

BRUCE: We're fairly remote . . . and peaceful.

DR. G.: Ah, peace—that's a rare luxury nowadays. . . . I see you've got old Hodgson working for you in the garden.

BRUCE: He's a funny old chap.

CECILY: I think he's a dear.

DR. G.: He's a real old scoundrel, isn't he . . . ? When he's had a drop too much he calls me "Old Doctor Kill-or-Cure," at the top of his voice outside the Red Lion.

They all laugh.

Well, now, your wife wants me to have a look at you, I understand?

BRUCE: It's really nothing at all—you know what women are.

DR. G.: No harm in having an overhaul now and then. Where can we——?

CECILY: Perhaps upstairs.

DR. G.: Thank you. (*To BRUCE*): Will you lead the way?

BRUCE: O.K. (*He goes upstairs.*) But I'm sure we're bothering you for nothing.

DR. G. (*as he follows him*): Never mind, I always say it would be a very good thing if people wouldn't wait until they were really ill before calling in the doctor.

CECILY crosses to the kitchen door.

CECILY (*calling*): Ethel! Clear the tea things, will you?

ETHEL enters. CECILY wanders to the French windows and looks into the garden.

Hullo, Hodgson, what have you got there?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

HODGSON *comes into sight carrying a small earth-stained sack.*

HODGSON : Just what I was bringin' up to show yer, Mum.

ETHEL *exits with tea things.*

CECILY : What is it ? Ferrets ?

HODGSON : No, ferrets is soft and wriggly. This what's in 'ere's hard and still. Digged 'un up, I did—over by that south wall.

CECILY : Perhaps it's hidden treasure. How exciting ! Bring it in and let's have a look.

HODGSON *comes carefully into the room.*

It isn't wet, is it ?

HODGSON : Not with this dry summer it isn't, Mum.

He puts the sack on the floor and stoops, fiddling with the string.

CECILY : Shall I fetch a knife ?

HODGSON : I can manage with me fingers, Mum. Can't abide cuttin' string. . . . There !

He has opened the sack and delves into it, producing a smallish bottle.

A bottle . . . an empty, too.

CECILY : A bottle of what ?

HODGSON : Well, it *was* a bottle of—what's this yere on the label ? (*Reading with difficulty*) Per—per—oxid—

CECILY : Peroxide ! How odd ! What else is there ?

He delves again and produces another similar bottle, and another, and so on until there are five or six.

HODGSON : Don't seem much like 'idden treasure to me, Mum . . . lot of empty bottles.

CECILY : No. Have they been there long, do you think ?

HODGSON : I reckon not. Earth was middlin' loose round 'em.

ACT II.—SCENE II.

CECILY: What a strange thing! All those bottles of peroxide.

HODGSON: I was wonderin' if you knew anythin' about 'em.

CECILY: No, I certainly don't. I'll ask Mr. Lovell—they may be something to do with his photography. He's upstairs with the doctor at present.

HODGSON: Aye, I saw doctor arrivin'; rare old character 'e is—poor old chap.

CECILY: Surely he's no older than you are, Hodgson?

HODGSON: No older! 'E's sixty-five, if 'e's a day.

CECILY: And how old are you?

HODGSON: I? I'll be fifty-nine come next dung-spreadin'—

CECILY (*lamely*): Oh!

HODGSON: Doctor Gribble's all right, far as doctors go.

CECILY: Ah! You haven't got much opinion of them?

HODGSON: Well, I asks you, Mum. There's been doctors goin' on now for 'undreds of years—studying and readin' in their books—and what do they know in the end? They can cut you open and have a look at the works, and maybe you get well and maybe you don't. But there's one thing I always asks 'em. Do you know what that is, Mum?

CECILY (*amused*): No. What?

HODGSON: "Can you cure a cold?" I says to 'em. "Do you know what a cold *is*?" I asks 'em. "Do you know 'ow to stop me catchin' one next winter?" I says—and that stumps 'em. Nothing serious wrong with the master, I 'ope, Mum.

CECILY: No, no, I don't think so. But I've been a little anxious about him lately.

HODGSON: A change of air'll do him good—more

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

good than any doctor. Ethel tells me you're goin' to foreign parts, Mum.

CECILY : Yes, at the end of the month.

HODGSON : When I was a lad I was always hankering after a bit of travel myself. I did go to Brighton once on a beanfeast with a lot of other chaps from the Red Lion.

CECILY : And what did you think of Brighton ?

HODGSON : Beer's rotten ; and in the shooting gallery on the pier I got a bad sixpence in my change. That cured me of travel all right.

He exits.

DR. GRIBBLE *comes downstairs.*

CECILY : Well, doctor ?

DR. G. : He'll be down in a minute. He's just putting his things on.

CECILY : But the examination—— ? ”

DR. G. : Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Lovell, nothing much wrong with him.

CECILY : Oh, I'm so glad.

DR. G. : Just one thing, Mrs. Lovell : Your husband isn't worried about anything . . . er—business matters ? Or possibly some little domestic anxiety ?

CECILY : No, oh, no. I'm sure he'd have told me if there was anything.

DR. G. : I asked him myself, of course, but he said “No,” most emphatically ; but I thought perhaps you might know of——

CECILY : No, no, nothing at all. Why do you ask ?

DR. G. : Well, as a matter of fact—mark you, it isn't at all serious—but I think your husband is suffering from some slight myo-cardial conditions.

CECILY : What is that ?

DR. G. : It's nothing to be alarmed about, I assure you—it's quite a common condition—it's merely a

ACT II.—SCENE II.

question of taking things quietly—nothing more. He mustn't overexert himself in any way. His pulse is 120.

CECILY: Isn't that very high?

DR. G.: No, but we don't want it to get any worse. He's rather an excitable type of man, isn't he?

CECILY: Oh, no, I shouldn't say that. Perhaps he's been a little bit nervy lately.

DR. G.: Well, he became quite agitated when I suggested he might see a specialist—he absolutely refused.

CECILY: Do you think he'll be well enough to travel? We're intending to go abroad at the end of the month.

DR. G.: Oh, yes, I think so—yes, certainly, as long as he takes things quietly in the meantime. I'll send along some medicine. (*He is looking at the books.*) All the "Notable Trials" series. I see you're interested in criminology.

CECILY: Oh, no, it's my husband. He's very keen.

DR. G. (*interested*): Really? So am I.

CECILY: Personally I find it rather a morbid study.

DR. G.: Oh, no, surely not, if you approach it in the right spirit.

CECILY: Scientific, you mean? I'm afraid I can't keep it up; I always get the horrors.

DR. G.: Ah, a pity . . . ! I have quite a nice little library of criminology myself. It would be interesting to have some chats with your husband. He might like to borrow some of my books.

CECILY: That's very kind of you.

DR. G.: Well, I must be getting along. I'm late for my surgery. I'll look in again in a day or so.

CECILY (*dubiously*): You think it's necessary . . . ?

DR. G.: Ah, I know. You're thinking of your husband's objection to us poor medicos—yes, he told me;

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

but I flatter myself that I managed to overcome them. We got on capitally. Well, good-bye.

CECILY: Good-bye, doctor, and thank you so much.

DR. G. (*in doorway*): That's a remarkably fine second crop of antirrhinum.

CECILY: Ah, but you should have seen the first.

DR. G. (*in the distance*): My dahlias look like being rather fine this year. You must come and see them, if you don't go away.

CECILY: I should love to, if we don't——

She breaks off, considering the possibility of the doctor's last remark being significant. BRUCE enters down the staircase, fastening his jacket and setting his tie.

BRUCE: Nice old codger, that!

CECILY: I'm glad you liked him.

BRUCE (*sincerely*): Yes, I did. . . . (*He checks himself*) But I should say a little of him would go a long way. He mustn't become a habit.

CECILY: No, of course not. Let's hope there'll be no need.

BRUCE: He hasn't been scaring you about me, I hope?

CECILY: No, rather not. He says you've got to go quietly for a bit, that's all.

BRUCE: Well, I'll be good, I promise you.

CECILY (*going to him*): Darling!

They embrace.

Look what Hodgson dug up in the garden.

BRUCE: What? (*He moves casually to see, and stops dead.*)

CECILY is intent on the bottles.

CECILY: A lot of old peroxide bottles. Hodgson says they can't have been there very long. (*Pause*) Isn't it a funny thing? (*She looks up at him.*)

BRUCE (*quietly*): Yes, very odd.

CECILY: There's some left in this one.

ACT II.—SCENE II.

BRUCE: Is there? Very wasteful. (*He puts the bottle down apart from the others.*)

CECILY: Oh, well, another of life's great unsolved mysteries. I'll put them on the rubbish heap. (*She collects the bottles, except for the one which BRUCE has set aside.*) And then I must finish off my job before the light goes. Hodgson has been showing me how to make rose cuttings.

BRUCE: I'll come and help you.

CECILY: No, darling. Don't forget what Dr. Gribble said. You sit and read—you promised to be good, remember. (*She picks up her gardening gloves and throws her scarf to one side.*) I don't want that; it's too warm.

BRUCE: Oh, very well. Don't be too long.

She exits.

Left alone, BRUCE comes slowly and picks up the scarf. He is smiling pleasantly to himself. He bends his head over the scarf sentimentally and rubs his face against it gently, then slowly he raises his head, and you can see that his expression has changed to an extent that is utterly terrifying. He stands very still—he is trembling violently and increasingly. He makes as if to tear the scarf, but controls himself. He seems to shake himself back to apparent normality—he sighs deeply, then he wanders to the fireplace. He peers very carefully at himself in the mirror, scrutinising his hair minutely, then he returns to the table, picks up the peroxide bottle, which is not quite empty, and walks slowly to the cellar stairs and, descending them, disappears as the lights fade out to blackness, during which—

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT THREE

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ACT THREE

SCENE ONE

SCENE: The same. It is late afternoon about a fortnight after. The light is very golden on the empty stage.

As the curtain rises, BRUCE is coming downstairs very slowly and quietly. He has a book under his arm. He sits on the sofa for a moment and opens the book as if referring to something. He looks up—a new idea has struck him. He puts down the book, searches in his pocket and produces a ten-shilling note. He exits quickly through the kitchen door. After a minute or two he returns and pauses at the head of the cellar stairs. He makes a move to descend, but hears MAVIS and CECILY approaching from the garden, and very quickly and stealthily hurries back up the stairs.

MAVIS and CECILY enter through the front door.

CECILY (*off*): Down, Prince, down!

Barking.

He always behaves like this in front of visitors—Oh, you bad dog! No—Prince, I won't have you in.

MAVIS (*entering*): Do let him in.

CECILY (*following her*): No. He's a darling, but so destructive. I've found scarves and gloves of mine torn to pieces recently. No—no, you stay there, Prince. Oh, damn!

MAVIS: What's the matter?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY: I've forgotten to pick those flowers for you.

MAVIS: Never mind.

CECILY: Oh, no, no, I can't let you go back without some flowers. I'll ask Hodgson.

Goes to French windows and calls out.

Hodgson!

HODGSON (*in the distance*): Yes, Mum?

CECILY: Pick a large bunch of flowers, will you, and tie them up; they're to take back to London.

HODGSON (*off*): Very good, Mum.

CECILY (*to MAVIS*): What a ridiculous place this is, having no decent train after eight o'clock.

MAVIS (*looking at grandfather clock*): What's the time now?

CECILY: It's no good looking at that clock, we've lost the key. It hasn't been going for weeks. It can't be much after seven. Sit down and have a drink.

MAVIS: Yes, I could do with a whisky and soda after that walk.

CECILY pours out drinks.

CECILY: Bruce will probably be down before you go, to say good-bye.

MAVIS: Somehow I rather doubt that.

CECILY: Oh, but you seemed to be getting on much better this time.

MAVIS: It was only by us both exercising the greatest control, and he was at the end of his tether by the time he'd finished tea. He did the wisest thing in going up to lie down.

CECILY: But he lies down every afternoon—he really isn't well, you know.

MAVIS: That's obvious. I've never seen such a change in a man.

CECILY: Yes, and he's not improving—quite the

ACT III.—SCENE I.

reverse, in fact—in spite of having followed the doctor's advice and keeping quiet.

MAVIS: Well, now that we're on the subject, I do think—you won't mind me saying it?—but I do think it's extremely unwise of you to set off on your travels to-morrow.

CECILY: My dear, I know, but Bruce is determined.

MAVIS: Can't you make him see sense?

CECILY: I've done everything I can. We had a—we almost had a scene about it before you arrived this morning.

MAVIS: How about the doctor?

CECILY: I'm afraid that's no use. He was very nearly rude to Doctor Gribble when he called yesterday.

MAVIS: Well, I do hope you'll be all right. Of course, it's useless for me to attempt to—hallo!

She picks up BRUCE's notebook, which is on the floor.
Is this yours?

CECILY: No, it's Bruce's notebook. It's not like him to leave things about, he's so frightfully tidy—and methodical. He makes notes and memorandums of the quaintest things. . . . I wonder what he's got down for to-day?

MAVIS: Doesn't he mind you reading his secrets?

CECILY: Not a bit. He's often shown it to me. Ah, here we are, September 25th—"Mavis for the day."

MAVIS: Dear me, I'm honoured.

CECILY: Then there's another note. "9 p.m."

MAVIS: H'm. 9 p.m.! What's that—an assignation?

CECILY: Darling, he would be very clever if he started anything like that here. Believe it or not, but Ethel is the village beauty. No, I think it's to remind him about clearing up the dark room.

MAVIS (*almost to herself*): What a very trivial thing to make a note about.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY: Really, this notebook is too funny. Listen to this. (*Reading*) "March 25th, marry Cecily. St. Luke's inquire re tips to verger, etc. April 7th, get your hair cut"—that comes in regularly once a fortnight. "April 15th. Move into the cottage." (*To herself*) Silly darling. . . . Then there's this chemical stuff H_2O_2 . It comes in regularly every week since the beginning of the year.

MAVIS: What is it?

CECILY: H_2O_2 . It's something he uses for his photography.

MAVIS: *Does* one use peroxide in photography?

CECILY: Is H_2O_2 peroxide?

MAVIS: Certainly, H_2O_2 is hydrogen peroxide.

CECILY: Are you *sure*?

MAVIS: Absolutely. I clean my teeth with it sometimes. The formula is often on the label.

CECILY: What a funny thing I didn't notice it.

MAVIS: Notice what?

CECILY: Well, Hodgson dug up a whole lot of empty bottles of peroxide, and when I asked Bruce, he said he knew nothing about it . . . and yet here's peroxide occurring regularly in his notebook.

MAVIS: Perhaps his hair is going a bit gray, and he's touching it up.

CECILY: Oh, don't be silly.

MAVIS: I dare say there are some "silver hairs amongst the gold," and he's keeping it secret.

CECILY: Nonsense! Have a cigarette.

CECILY *hands the cigarette-box*. MAVIS *takes a cigarette*.

MAVIS: You're still using that dear old *Arabian Nights* cigarette-box.

CECILY: Of course. I couldn't part with that. . . . Nigel gave it to me.

ACT III.—SCENE I.

MAVIS : I hadn't forgotten.

CECILY : You said that as though you thought I had.
. . . you're wrong. I often think of Nigel.

MAVIS : Listen, Cecily, won't you see him?

CECILY : Would it really be any help to him?

MAVIS : He wants nothing more than your friendship. He can't bear to think that all the years you were engaged, all the affection and understanding, have come to nothing at all.

CECILY : It does seem a terrible pity. But it's no use now—nor for heavens knows how long. We're going away to-morrow.

MAVIS : My dear, I've got a confession to make. . . . I didn't come down by train—it wasn't the station taxi that dropped me at the top of the lane—it was Nigel's car.

CECILY : What?

MAVIS : He's here now.

CECILY : Where?

MAVIS : In the village waiting at the pub—The Blue Pig, or whatever it is.

CECILY : The Red Lion.

MAVIS : We've had a little conspiracy.

CECILY : What about?

MAVIS : I arranged for him to meet me here at half-past seven. If the atmosphere was at all difficult I was to stop him at the top of the lane.

CECILY : But supposing Bruce—

MAVIS : Oh, Nigel won't stay more than five minutes ; and if Bruce comes down I'll square things with him.

CECILY : It would be lovely to see him again, but really I don't know that I—

HODGSON *enters with a large bunch of flowers.*

MAVIS : Oh, aren't they lovely?

HODGSON : It hasn't left much show in the herbaceous

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

border, Mum, but that won't matter, you goin' away to-morrow.

CECILY: Hodgson is very proud of his border—aren't you?

MAVIS: I'm not surprised—the whole garden looks perfectly lovely.

HODGSON: Oh, it's a proper enough place if you don't mind being lonely.

MAVIS: It certainly is a bit off the map.

HODGSON: Yes, Miss, that's why Mr. Dunning let the place go so cheap.

CECILY: Oh, I don't know that I should call fifteen hundred pounds cheap exactly.

MAVIS: Is that what you paid?

HODGSON: Fifteen 'undred pounds! Never, Mum! Nine hundred an' fifty pounds Mr. Dunning was askin' for it, beggin' yer pardon—nine hundred and fifty pounds.

CECILY: Oh, no, Hodgson, you're wrong.

HODGSON: You'll ex-cuse me, Mum, but it were common talk in the village. Why, I even 'eard Mr. Dunning himself saying that was the most 'e could ask for it. Complained about it, 'e did, saying that 'e'd be out of pocket with all the money 'e'd spent on the place, an' all.

CECILY: Well, I don't care what Mr. Dunning said. We never met him. My husband did it all through the agents, but I do know the price, because I wrote the cheque myself.

HODGSON: Well, I dare say you knows best, Mum, but nine hundred and fifty pounds was the price we understood in the village. Well, I'd better finish dis-budding them chrysanthemums before I go 'ome.

He exits.

MAVIS: What a funny thing!

ACT III.—SCENE I.

CECILY: Oh, my dear, the most marvellous stories go round this village. I once had a cherry-brandy at the Red Lion, and they've said I'm a dipsomaniac ever since—not that we know a soul, but I get all the local “dirt” from Ethel.

MAVIS: But you bought the house yourself?

CECILY: No, no, I just advanced the money because Bruce's was tied up for the moment—you know—securities, solicitors and all that.

MAVIS: Oh, I see.

The dog barks. MAVIS looks out of the window.

MAVIS: It's Nigel! You can meet him on your own. I'm going to watch Hodgson disbudding chrysanthemums—whatever that may be—I hope it's nothing rude!

She exits into the garden.

There is a knock on the door. CECILY opens it and reveals NIGEL on the doorstep. They stand looking at each other for quite a long time.

CECILY (*quietly*): You are looking well.

NIGEL (*smiling*): May I come in?

CECILY: Please. Mavis has gone all “Auntie Loo-Loo” and left us alone.

NIGEL: You've no idea, Cecily, how kind she's been over all this. It is good to see you.

CECILY: It's not so bad seeing you again. (*She moves towards him impulsively.*) Oh, my dear, you don't know how I've wanted to tell you. . . . Here, sit down! Have a cigarette! Have a drink!

NIGEL: Half a moment, let's take this quite calmly. Come on, let's sit down.

They sit side by side.

CECILY (*after a pause*): Well?

NIGEL: Well?

They both laugh.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY: I'm longing to hear all your news. You've no idea how glad I am to see you looking so fit.

NIGEL: That was one of the reasons I wanted to see you. I didn't want you to go away on your travels with the idea that you'd turned me into a shuddering drug fiend or anything like that.

CECILY (*laughing*): My dear, don't!

NIGEL: And you? You're happy?

CECILY: Enormously.

NIGEL: I'm glad.

CECILY: That's sweet of you.

NIGEL: No, honestly, I am—I'm not being all noble and "Eric or Little by Little." Just because I can't have you myself it doesn't mean I've gone bitter and resent your marriage being a success.

CECILY: It is—a grand success. Of course, I suppose one can't expect . . . Well, I mean, Bruce's health has been a bit of a worry since we've been here, but the change will put him right, I'm sure.

NIGEL: Where are you going?

CECILY: Anywhere. Everywhere!

NIGEL: Ah, that's what you've always wanted.

CECILY: Yes, but you know, it's a funny thing, now it comes to the point, I'm awfully sorry to be leaving here.

NIGEL *laughs*.

Yes, I know. I'm a perverse idiot, aren't I?

NIGEL: My dear, so was I when you turned me down. I was very stupid and pig-headed with you. That old Sudan had made me stodgy—

CECILY: Oh, no!

NIGEL: Oh, yes, it had—too much tinned asparagus and sand in your ears!

They both laugh.

ACT III.—SCENE I.

CECILY: Don't be silly. I can't have you taking any blame—let's be honest. I behaved abominably to you.

NIGEL: Don't let's talk about it. You had been unsettled by your money—my imagination had gone dulled and I didn't really understand—and that's that.

CECILY: I think it's grand of you to be so generous about it.

NIGEL: Don't you run away with the idea that I don't still care for you—I do. There'll never be any one else—and for Gawd's sake don't say "You'll meet some nice girl one day." I shan't!

CECILY: Oh, very well. When do you start work in your London office?

NIGEL: Said she, tactfully changing the subject. In a month's time. The Wentworths have asked me up to Scotland till then for some shooting.

CECILY: How very social.

NIGEL: Social, my foot! Suicidal if you get anywhere near Stanley Wentworth.

CECILY: I suppose there'll be awful photographs in the *Tatler*. . . . Do you suppose Alice Wentworth can get all that on a shooting-stick?

They both roll with laughter.

NIGEL: I'm motoring up to-morrow. I want to do it in the day if I can. I shall have to start at the crack of dawn. Why "crack"—extraordinary expressions we have in the English language.

MAVIS *enters*.

MAVIS: I'm getting ideas about Hodgson—he really is a lamb—devoted to you. (*Looking towards the stairs.*) Well, I don't know, I don't want to break up the party, but I think perhaps we ought to be getting back. You've got to get up early to-morrow, you know, Nigel.

CECILY: Oh, no, no; it's so lovely having you both

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

here. You must have something to eat before you go, anyway.

MAVIS : How about—er—— ? (*She glances upstairs.*)

CECILY : Oh, yes—well—I—wait a moment. I'll pop up and see him.

She runs upstairs.

NIGEL : I say, Mavis, old girl, I'm frightfully grateful to you for——

MAVIS : My dear Nigel, you know exactly how I feel about the whole business. Do you feel better about things now ?

NIGEL : Yes. . . . Mind you, my feelings about her will never alter—that's dead certain. I'm crazy about her—I always shall be. . . . However . . . She does seem to be really happy, doesn't she ?

MAVIS : Do you think so ?

NIGEL : I'm asking you.

MAVIS : As a matter of fact, Nigel, there are one or two things—quite apart from the fact that I don't like the man—there are one or two things that strike me as distinctly odd.

NIGEL : In what way ?

MAVIS : Well, his appearance has altered so much—he looks almost alarming.

NIGEL : Alarming ? How do you mean ?

MAVIS : Another thing—about this house, it strikes me as extremely "fishy" that Bruce should have——

At this moment they hear BRUCE's voice from the room upstairs—only because it is obviously raised.

BRUCE (*off stage, faintly*) : That's too much ! That woman's been here all day and now that man. No ! I won't have it—you can cut the idea right out !

MAVIS and NIGEL look at each other. *There is a pause.*

MAVIS : We shall have to get along, Nigel.

ACT III.—SCENE I.

NIGEL: Obviously. I don't quite like—— What was that you were saying about the house?

MAVIS: Well, you see, Bruce—— Ssh! She's coming. I'll tell you in the car.

CECILY *comes downstairs with a slightly despondent droop.*

CECILY (*standing at the foot of the stairs*): I'm so sorry. Bruce is feeling rather off-colour—a bit nervy and all that——

NIGEL: My dear, we quite understand. After all's said and done, it *is* a bit awkward.

MAVIS: We shan't be back in town till very late, as it is.

CECILY: Oh, I do so wish you hadn't to go. It's been so lovely seeing you both—all three of us here in the country. . . . It's like that time when we were at the place—— Oh, you know—what is it? That place where the river's very wide and there is a weir. (*She runs to MAVIS and flings her arms round her.*) Good-bye, darling, it's been heaven to-day. (*She goes to NIGEL, hesitates a moment and then flings her arms round him.*) Good-bye, I shall see you when we come home. Have a lovely time in Scotland.

MAVIS: You'll write to us, won't you, my dear?

CECILY: Of course I shall—if we're not out of touch with a post office.

NIGEL: Ah ha! "Mrs. Livingstone," I presume! You'll be back when, do you think?

CECILY: Next spring, or early summer, I expect.

They are right at the door now. MAVIS goes out ahead.
Good-bye, my dears.

MAVIS: You're sure you're all right?

CECILY: Yes, of course.

MAVIS: Well, I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll ring you up when we get back to say good-night.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY : A charming thought, dear, but we're not on the phone.

MAVIS : Oh ! Good-bye.

She goes.

NIGEL : Au revoir. Er—well—take care of yourself.

He exits.

HODGSON *enters carrying a rose behind his back.*

CECILY : Ah, Hodgson, finished with the chrysanthemums ?

HODGSON : Yes, mum, I be off 'ome now. Thought I'd look in and wish you good-bye.

CECILY : That's very kind of you, Hodgson.

ETHEL *enters.*

Ethel—the flowers—run after them.

ETHEL *hurries off through the front door with the flowers.*

HODGSON : I'll keep a good eye on things while you're away. You can rely on me.

CECILY : I'm sure I can.

HODGSON : It's a pleasure workin' for any one as fond of flowers as you, Mum, and I was thinking you might like a buttonhole for your dress this evening. (*He produces the rose from behind his back.*) It's the last one left on the prize standard in the corner.

CECILY : Oh, it's divine—"the Last Rose of Summer."

HODGSON *roars with laughter.*

HODGSON : Vicar's wife sang that song at the concert at Christmas—"The Last Rose of Summer." It sent me out for the last drink of the evening. (*More laughter.*) Well, good-bye, Mum, and good luck.

ETHEL *enters, puffing excitedly.*

CECILY : Good-bye, Hodgson, and thank you so much. Take care of that rheumatism.

Exit HODGSON.

ACT III.—SCENE I.

ETHEL: Oo! The gentleman gave me ten shillin'.

CECILY: That was very kind of him.

ETHEL: That makes a 'ole pound with the ten shillin' the master gave me.

CECILY: The *master* gave you?

ETHEL: Yes, on top of me wages—ten shillin' he give me to go to the fair to-night.

CECILY: I'd no idea there *was* any fair.

ETHEL: Yes'm, it always comes late in the year 'ereabouts, and master said I could go 'ome early, and it didn't matter how late I stayed at the fair as I wouldn't be wanted in the morning.

CECILY: Well, this is the first I've heard of all this.

ETHEL (*crestfallen*): Oh, then—please, Mum, shan't I——?

CECILY (*smiling*): That's all right, Ethel, the master's right, there's no real need—yes, you can go.

ETHEL: Oh, thank you, Mum—thank you. (*She goes to the door.*)

CECILY: Well, I don't know when I shall be seeing you again.

ETHEL: Oh, lor', Mum—that fair had driven it clean out of me 'ead. Good-bye, Mum. I hope you have a nice time.

CECILY: Thank you, Ethel. You'll look after things, won't you, while I'm away?

ETHEL: That I will, Mum. An' I'll have a rare old spring cleanin' for when you comes back.

CECILY: We'll give you good warning about that.

ETHEL: Everythin's ready for supper, I think, Mum. I've put all the things on the tray. Will there be anythin' else, Mum?

CECILY: No, thank you, Ethel. Good-bye.

ETHEL: Good-bye, Mum.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY : Enjoy yourself at the fair. Who are you going with ? That nice postman ?

ETHEL (*contemptuously*) : Oh, him ! No, M'm. I'm goin' with Ted Saunders, who brings the milk.

She goes out leaving CECILY smiling. She rises and goes towards the staircase. DR. GRIBBLE enters.

DR. G. : May I come in ?

CECILY (*with a touch of dismay*) : Oh, good-evening, Dr. Gribble, I wasn't expecting you.

DR. G. : This isn't exactly a professional visit, Mrs. Lovell. I'm very anxious not to disturb your husband more than is necessary, but I do really feel that it's most unwise for him to go away at present.

CECILY : Why ? Do you think he's worse ?

DR. G. : Well, I'm not at all happy about him. Where is he now ?

CECILY : He's upstairs, resting.

DR. G. : Don't disturb him.

CECILY : He'll be down soon for supper.

DR. G. : I want you to let me make one more effort to get him to see reason.

CECILY : If only you could—but——

DR. G. : It occurred to me that if I were to have a chat with him on some other subject, I might be able to win his confidence a little more.

CECILY : Yes, I see what you mean.

DR. G. : So I've brought him the latest of the *Notable Trials* series, I've just finished reading it—I'm sure it'll interest him, knowing America as he does.

CECILY : What is it ?

DR. G. : *The Trial of "Darkie" Bellingham*, the papers were full of it last year—it was an extremely interesting case.

CECILY : He was a murderer, wasn't he ? I seem to remember something——

ACT III.—SCENE I.

DR. G. : Well, he was tried actually for attempted murder, but he was brilliantly defended, and he got an acquittal. Later evidence came to hand that showed that he was guilty beyond all possible doubt. But he'd disappeared by then. (*Turning over the pages of the book.*) And yet he was quite a pleasant-looking fellow. There he is, look—— (*He shows her the photograph.*) Really quite nice-looking. You can see why they nicknamed him "Darkie."

CECILY : I don't like the moustache or the eyeglass.

DR. G. : Oh, that was part of the pose he adopted—the American idea of the typical Englishman—they said in the States that he was an Oxford man, but I don't think that's likely.

CECILY : No ?

DR. G. : Murdering five women seems rather too rough for Oxford. These mass murderers are nearly all the same—it would seem that they get worked up to a certain pitch of insanity and then the crime itself apparently clears their brains for a while. Anyhow, it's fascinating reading.

CECILY : Oh, but how silly I am. I'm almost certain Bruce has got the book already, he's been reading it recently. Now, where is it ? Ah !

She finds the book where BRUCE left it on the sofa.

Yes, here it is, it arrived from Mudies the other day. There's no photograph in this one—I wonder why not ?

DR. G. : How odd ! It's certainly the same edition.

He comes to her, his book open at the Bellingham photograph.

CECILY (*glancing at photograph*) : That photograph is like some one . . . I can't think who.

DR. G. : Some one in the village, perhaps ? There's a faint look of Judson, the butcher.

CECILY : No, that isn't who I'm thinking of . . .

DR. G. : Judson's been here years, otherwise it would

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

be an unsavoury thought that one might be buying one's Sunday joint from a murderer.

CECILY: Oh, horrible. (*She listens.*) Here's Bruce coming down. I do hope he won't be——

DR. G. (*putting his book on a side-table*): That's all right. I'll ride him on the snaffle, Mrs. Lovell.

BRUCE *enters, unaware of* DR. GRIBBLE.

BRUCE: Ah, well, thank heavens she's gone! I can't stick people butting in when they're not——

He sees DR. GRIBBLE.

DR. G.: Good-evening, Lovell. I just looked in for a little chat, and I've brought you a——

BRUCE *is in a much more erratic state than he was before. He interrupts the doctor.*

BRUCE (*with quiet intensity*): What I just said goes for you too, Dr. Gribble.

DR. G. (*taken aback*): I beg your pardon?

BRUCE: I won't have people butting in.

CECILY: Bruce, dear!

DR. G.: My dear Lovell, I assure you . . .

BRUCE: I thought I made it pretty clear when you were here yesterday, that it was to be your last visit.

CECILY: But, Bruce, this isn't a visit. Dr. Gribble has very kindly brought——

BRUCE: Oh, don't you tell me—I know all right, you've been putting your heads together, conspiring to persuade me not to go away to-morrow. (*A pause.*) Go on, find an answer to that. . . . Let me tell you, Dr. Gribble, we're going first thing to-morrow, sure as I'm standing here. What I've planned, I've planned, and I'm sticking to it; I always do, and I always shall.

CECILY: Bruce, dear, Dr. Gribble has been most considerate, won't you——

ACT III.—SCENE I.

BRUCE: I'm sick of this place—that's what's wrong with me—if there is anything wrong—this damn constriction. Once I'm on a boat again I'll be as right as rain.

DR. G.: Look here, Lovell, have you thought about your wife? Supposing you're—

BRUCE: Have I got to tell you point-blank to get out? Or—say, is it your account you're worrying about?

CECILY: Bruce!

BRUCE: If it is, here you are. (*He throws some notes on the table.*) Five pounds for five visits, and that's a damn sight more than you usually get around here, and more than you're worth.

BRUCE *moves up to French windows and looks out.* DR.

GRIBBLE, *with quiet dignity, takes his hat from the table, and goes to CECILY with outstretched hand.*

CECILY (*quietly*): I'm so sorry, doctor.

DR. G.: Never mind, Mrs. Lovell. Good luck on your travels. Good-bye.

CECILY: Thank you, doctor, good-bye.

DR. GRIBBLE *goes, closing the front door behind him.*

There is a pause. CECILY *is on the verge of tears.*

Oh, Bruce, how could you! To be so rude and he's such a nice person. . . . I can't bear to see you get worked up like that . . . it spoils things so, and it's so bad for you.

BRUCE *comes to her, he puts his arm round her tenderly.*

BRUCE: Sorry, dearest, I'm a bit on edge, have been all day. I came down hoping to find us on our own, and it made me just wild when I saw that we weren't. Forgive me, honey. . . . I'll write to the old boy and apologise.

CECILY: Oh, will you?

BRUCE: Sure, I will, to-night, or from the boat. Oh, it's mean of me to make you unhappy, even for a moment.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

But you wait and see, I'll be a different person after to-day.
We'll have the grandest time.

CECILY : Oh, darling !

BRUCE : You've forgiven me ?

CECILY : How can I help it ?

He kisses her.

BRUCE : Hallo, there's my notebook.

CECILY : Yes, you left it lying about. . . . What does
9 p.m. mean ?

BRUCE : 9 p.m. ?

CECILY : It's down in your book for to-day.

BRUCE : Oh, yes, of course—yes, I'm clearing up the
dark room this evening.

CECILY : Ah, I thought it was that.

BRUCE : And you'll help me, my sweetest, won't
you ?

CECILY : Do you really need me ?

BRUCE : Well, why not ?

CECILY : I'm sure it's very dirty and dusty down there.

BRUCE : You know me better than that, it's spotless.

CECILY : All right.

BRUCE : What a lovely rose.

CECILY : Yes, Hodgson gave it to me when he came to
say good-bye. Oh, d'you know, he said that Dunning only
asked nine hundred and fifty pounds for this place ?

BRUCE : Hodgson said that, did he ?

CECILY : I tried to put him right on the subject, but I
don't think I quite convinced him. Darling, you don't
think we've been done, do you ?

BRUCE : Of course not—he's a damned old fool—you
know what village gossip is.

*BRUCE has wandered across the room and is looking
in the mirror.*

CECILY : Bruce, dear, I've been wondering. . . .

ACT III.—SCENE I.

BRUCE (*good-humouredly*): And what have you been wondering?

CECILY: Do you, by any chance, ever use peroxide on your hair?

He swings round fiercely.

BRUCE (*in a sharp uncontrolled voice*): What's that?

CECILY (*alarmed*): Darling, you *are* jumpy! It doesn't matter. It was only a silly personal question.

BRUCE (*menacingly*): What was that you said?

CECILY: I—I—I only asked if you ever used peroxide on your hair?

BRUCE (*furiously*): Who's been telling you I dye my hair?

CECILY: It isn't a question of dyeing. I only thought—

BRUCE: It's a lie. Why should I alter the colour of my hair? I'm fair. I've always been fair. I've never used a dye in my life.

CECILY: No, of course not, dear.

BRUCE: Well, then?

CECILY: I only thought you might have found a few grey hairs, and wanted to cover them up.

BRUCE: Oh, grey hairs. Oh, I see. . . . Oh, I thought you were suggesting that I . . .

CECILY: What?

BRUCE: Oh, never mind . . . don't give it another thought. I've never had a bottle of peroxide in the house.

CECILY: Oh, but how about H_2O_2 ?

BRUCE (*sharply*): Well, what about it?

CECILY: Mavis says that's the formula for peroxide.

BRUCE: God damn that girl! What does she want to interfere for?

CECILY: She wasn't interfering—I simply told her that you used it in your developer. You told me, don't you remember?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

BRUCE: Oh, yes, of course—yes, I've used it for *that*—you drove it out of my mind with your silly ideas about hair dye.

CECILY (*not quite convinced*): Oh, I see.

BRUCE: You believe me?

CECILY (*soothingly*): Yes, yes, of course . . . in any case, it's of no importance—let's change the subject.

BRUCE: By all means, my dear.

CECILY: How about a drink?

BRUCE: Certainly.

CECILY: What will you have—whisky? Oh, by the way, here's something that ought to interest you.

She fetches the DOCTOR's book, opens it at the photograph and thrusts it in front of him. He has not noticed her action until confronted with the photograph.

Who does that remind you of, darling?

BRUCE *stares at it, and then gives a strangled cry, so terrible that CECILY starts away from him terrified.*

Bruce—Bruce, darling, what on earth——?

BRUCE: How. . . . How did that photograph get back into my book?

CECILY: Get *back* into——?

BRUCE: I tore it out.

CECILY: Tore it out? But I don't understand.

He is advancing very slowly as she retreats.

BRUCE: I burnt it at the bottom of the garden, the ashes blew away, I saw them. How can they have got back? Tell me. . . .

CECILY: Bruce, don't look like that. I'll explain. You see, Dr. Gribble is——

BRUCE: Ah, so he's in it, too—a conspiracy? Gribble, Mavis and you—that's how it is, is it? What are you trying to find out? Why are you asking me all these questions . . . ? Tell me!

ACT III.—SCENE I.

CECILY'S terrified gaze drops from him for a moment to the photograph. He catches up with her. She raises her eyes again. Ghostly realisation steals across her face.
Give me the book!

He catches hold of it. She is numbed, staring at him.
She cannot release it.
Give me the book!

He takes the book. Her hands drop to her sides, but she still stares.

What's the matter. Why are you staring like that?

CECILY: You . . . you . . . startled me.

BRUCE: What do you mean—I startled you . . . ?
Why are you startled?

She realises that her only chance is to disguise her terror. She begins to act.

CECILY: Well, my darling . . . it's perfectly natural, isn't it? I show you a photograph in the copy of the book Dr. Gribble brought to lend you, not knowing you had it already.

BRUCE: You mean that was old Gribble's book?

CECILY: Of course it was.

BRUCE: Well, why in hell didn't you say so before?

CECILY: My dear, you didn't give me a chance. You flared up at me so. I thought you were going to be ill. That was why I was so frightened.

BRUCE (convinced): Oh, I see . . . yes, it was silly of me. I'm sorry.

CECILY: No, darling, it was silly of me to be such a baby—but you are a little . . . well, erratic this evening, aren't you?

BRUCE: It's just a mood, you know. You mustn't let me—

CECILY: Oh, I quite understand. It's been a fussy sort of day for you.

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

BRUCE: Never mind, I shall be all right to-morrow.

CECILY: I was silly to look at that sort of book at all—they always frighten me.

BRUCE: You poor kid, it's a shame. That was why I destroyed the photograph in my copy.

He kisses her. She stands rigid.

BRUCE: We'll get rid of this now, shall we? (*He tears the photograph out and moves to the French windows.*) (*As he goes out*): We'll make sure of it this time.

He exits.

She stands rooted to the ground for a few moments, then she rushes to BRUCE's own copy of the book and begins to read at random; she looks up from time to time in growing horror. Then she puts the book down in utter repulsion. She goes to the kitchen door and calls. Panic is overcoming her.

CECILY (*in a choking voice*): Ethel! Ethel!

She rushes into the kitchen. She re-enters and rushes wildly across to the front door and opens it. BRUCE is standing there.

BRUCE (*quietly*): Hallo, my dear. I've just been letting Prince off his chain. Where are you off to?

CECILY: I—I've just got to go down to the village for something.

BRUCE: Oh, what?

CECILY: Just a little oil for the salad.

BRUCE: Oh, but the shops will be shut.

CECILY: I could call at the side-door of the grocer's.

BRUCE: They'll all be at the fair. Besides, it's nearly eight o'clock. It isn't worth it for a drop of oil.

CECILY: I could hurry.

BRUCE: No, my precious, I'd rather you didn't go. There are a lot of undesirable people about. You know what it is with fairs, gypsies and so on. (*He locks the*

ACT III.—SCENE I.

door and puts the key in his pocket.) That's why I've let Prince loose. Heaven knows who may be prowling about. We'd better be on the safe side. *(He closes the French windows.)*

CECILY: Yes, you're quite right. I'd no idea it was so late. I'd better get the supper. *(She moves to the kitchen.)*

BRUCE: I'll come and help you. *(He joins her.)*

She stops a moment, swaying.

What's the matter?

CECILY *(recovering herself)*: Nothing . . . nothing. I just felt a little faint for a moment, that's all.

BRUCE: Ah, you want some food, that's what it is. . . . It'll never do to have you feeling faint, will it, sweetheart?

CECILY: No, no, of course not. *(She braces herself.)* I'm all right now. I look all right, don't I?

BRUCE: Yes, rather, you look swell.

CECILY: Good . . . come on, let's get supper.

They move towards the kitchen as the lights fade to blackness, after which—

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT THREE

SCENE TWO

SCENE : The same. About half an hour later.

BRUCE and CECILY are seated opposite each other at the supper table ; they have just finished.

The curtains over the French windows are not drawn.

BRUCE, *who is now quite insane, is in a condition of happy self-aggrandisement.*

BRUCE : A remarkably good supper . . . extraordinarily clever of you to have taught Ethel to make chicken salad so well.

CECILY : I'm glad—I'm glad you enjoyed it.

BRUCE : So am I ; after all, to-night is a special occasion—a celebration.

CECILY : Of course—yes—we're going away to-morrow.

BRUCE *laughs.*

What are you laughing at ?

BRUCE : Nothing, nothing.

CECILY : Have some more brandy.

BRUCE : No, thank you—I believe you're trying to make me drunk—you couldn't do that. I've got a very strong head. I used to be able to drink the rawest boot-legger's stuff. But it's always a pity to drink at moments like these—it deadens the appreciation.

CECILY : Oh, but you've only had one brandy all the evening.

ACT III.—SCENE II.

BRUCE: That's quite enough. There's a funny sort of buzzing in my head—more than buzzing, pounding—it's all right, I've had it before—just the excitement—(*she looks at him*)—of going away to-morrow.

CECILY: Don't you think you'd better finish your packing?

BRUCE: I practically finished that this afternoon. . . . That reminds me—I found the key of the clock in the pocket of one of my suits. . . . I'll wind the old clock now. What's the time?

CECILY: A quarter to nine. But it's hardly worth it if we're going away to-morrow.

BRUCE: It gives me a strange sort of thrill always to see the minutes slipping by on the face of a grandfather clock. (*He continues as he winds it.*) I can remember so well, standing in my headmaster's study at school, waiting for a beating, and seeing the hands move on—nothing I could do could stop them. (*The clock chimes the three-quarters.*) I can remember the funny mixture of sensations it used to give me . . . terror, and yet with it a strange sort of delight.

He raises his hands to his head, his back turned to
CECILY. *Watching him, she steals out to the kitchen.*

BRUCE *apparently does not notice her. He returns to the top of the table, struggling with his growing excitement.*

I locked that back door, dear, when we were getting the supper.

There is a pause.

CECILY: I was just fetching the coffee.

She re-enters with the coffee on a tray and puts it down on the table, watching him furtively. She pours out a cup.

BRUCE's hands are at his head again.

CECILY: Here's your coffee.

BRUCE (*absently*): What?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY: Here's your coffee.

BRUCE: O—yes—how far away your voice sounds. It must be my head.

CECILY: Don't you think you'd better lie down?

BRUCE: Oh, no, it's not unpleasant. I'm afraid you've been wasting your sympathy over my little attacks, my dear. It may sound funny to you, but d'you know, they're almost enjoyable. . . . The sense of pace inside one, the pounding faster and faster, becomes almost music—wild, rushing music. . . . The outlines of things become blurred, but their colours brighter. . . . What's the time now?

CECILY: Ten minutes to nine.

BRUCE: No, it's more, surely—eight minutes to. Nearly seven, isn't it?

CECILY: No, dear, only just ten to.

BRUCE: We must be getting to work soon.

CECILY: Don't you think it would be better not to do any more this evening. . . . I'm sure an early night would do you good.

BRUCE: No, I've made my plans. I never alter my plans.

CECILY (*calmly*): Oh, all right.

BRUCE: You're a sensible girl, aren't you?

CECILY: How do you mean?

BRUCE: You don't "go on" at a man. Very few women can say, "Oh, all right," and leave it at that. . . . But, then, most women are fools. (*He smiles to himself.*)

CECILY: Do you think so? (*Trying to be conversational.*)

BRUCE: I don't think! I know—born fools. . . . ! And woman's weakness is man's opportunity. Did some one write that, or did I think of it myself? If I did, it's good—damn good! "Woman's weakness is man's opportunity."

ACT III.—SCENE II.

CECILY: You have extraordinary insight into things.
. . . Have some more coffee.

BRUCE: Please. . . . Yes, you're right, I have great insight. You see, I'm—well—I'm different from other people.

CECILY: Yes, I think you are.

BRUCE: I've a lot of power over women, for instance. I've always had it. I discovered quite early in life that I could twist women round my little finger. It's a useful gift.

CECILY: It must be.

BRUCE: Boyish—that's the note they like—makes them feel maternal. . . . The eternal boy. . . . It gets them every time—and if you can be slightly different from their own men folk. . . .

CECILY: In what way?

BRUCE: Well, in America, for instance, English—with a slight drawl and possibly a tittle thrown in.

CECILY: And in England.

BRUCE: Well, in England—a Colonial, or vaguely American type, goes down well, a suggestion of adventurous "he-man" . . . the prairies and so on. . . . That seems to do the trick.

CECILY: Yes . . . I see.

BRUCE: I thought it would as soon as the house-agent told me about you letting your flat because you'd won the Sweep, and then when I saw you— (*With a change to slight suspicion at something he sees in her face*): I don't know why I'm saying all this to you, I'm sure.

CECILY (*reassuring him*): Oh, because you know I'm interested. (*Her bitterness, for a moment, overcomes her fear.*) A woman never gets tired of hearing how a man came to fall in love with her.

BRUCE: No, of course she doesn't, does she, my

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

treasure? Real romance, wasn't it? (*He takes her hands.*)
Happy ever after.

CECILY (*drawing away*): It's rather airless in here.

BRUCE: Is it?

CECILY: Yes. We've got all the doors and windows shut. I feel quite breathless. (*She moves to the window.*)

BRUCE: I'll open it for you. (*He crosses ahead of her. Then he checks himself.*) Why, you're shivering!

CECILY: No!

BRUCE: Oh, yes, you are. You don't want that night air. What you need is a cup of coffee.

CECILY: No, thanks.

BRUCE: Why not?

CECILY: I just couldn't, that's all.

BRUCE: Nonsense. It'll do you good. (*He pours her out some.*)

He moves restlessly about the room humming the "Merry Widow Waltz" in time to the pounding in his head. He pauses at the top of the cellar stairs and looks down.

CECILY takes up the coffee cup mechanically. Her hand is trembling so much that she puts it down, and it upsets as she does so.

Do you know, I believe that clock's slow. There's no point in waiting. (*He makes a half move towards her.*)

CECILY: Oh, yes, there is. Half the pleasure of a thing is waiting for it—you said so yourself just now.

BRUCE: Did I?

CECILY: You remember! You're different from other men.

BRUCE: Oh, yes—of course—yes, you're right.

There is a pause. BRUCE takes up the Bellingham book. A strange coincidence, Dr. Gribble reading the same book as me. . . . I wonder if, by any chance . . . Oh, no, of course not. Still, it was a funny coincidence.

ACT III.—SCENE II.

CECILY: Yes, wasn't it?

BRUCE: I wonder what he makes of it all. I should like to know. They're nearly all so hopelessly wrong. They say most murderers are mad—that they've got a kink somewhere. That's nonsense. A murderer is often a man who's a bit saner than other people. Don't you agree?

CECILY: Yes, I dare say . . . certainly.

BRUCE (*still with the book*): Armstrong was clever, but not clever enough. Palmer of Rugeley became over-confident. They all get like that, and it's fatal. . . . Now, Bellingham here. . . . What do you think of Bellingham, my dear?

CECILY: You know I don't study these things. I know nothing about him.

BRUCE: No? A pity. He's well worth studying. He's the cleverest of the lot. He never makes a mistake. Women have fallen for him every time. They've gone to the country with him; they've given up everything for him; they've signed away their fortunes.

CECILY: He must be very clever.

BRUCE: He's a genius. Did old Gribble discuss the case with you?

CECILY (*absently*): I don't know. Oh, yes—yes—he said something about the case being unique.

BRUCE: Did he. Well, he's quite right. It certainly was—it certainly was. . . . What I can't get over is us both reading the book at the same time.

CECILY: Oh, I don't know. You're both interested in—the same subject. You both read the new books on it.

BRUCE: But to-day, of all days.

CECILY: Why?

BRUCE: Oh, never mind.

BRUCE *moves to the clock and stands staring at it.*

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

She moves to the gramophone and puts it on to distract his attention. He leaves the clock and comes and listens. He paces up and down restlessly, then turns off the gramophone.

CECILY: Really, Bruce, if you don't mind, I think I'll go to bed now. I'm terribly tired.

BRUCE: No, you're forgetting, you promised to help me.

CECILY: Well, let's sit down for a little, first.

BRUCE: I couldn't, I'm too restless.

CECILY: Oh, yes, you can. I'll read to you.

BRUCE: I couldn't attend.

CECILY: I'll read. (*Looking round desperately for a book*): I'll read to you about "Darkie" Bellingham.

He pauses.

BRUCE: Yes—yes—I should like to hear some one else reading it—reading it out loud. Thousands and thousands must have read it, may be reading it now; and one can't see or hear them. Such a pity! Yes—yes, that's a good idea. Read to me about Bellingham. Begin at the introduction. It's got all the best part of it there.

He sits.

CECILY (*reading*): "George Edward Bellingham, to give him the name by which he was tried, for his real name is still unknown——"

BRUCE *chuckles*.

CECILY: "Still unknown, has a multitude of aliases, and has been popularly nicknamed 'Darkie' Bellingham, 'The Californian Bluebeard.' He was acquitted on an attempted murder charge owing to insufficient evidence and the brilliance of his defence, although he was suspected of having done away with no less than five young women."

ACT III.—SCENE II.

BRUCE : Five. Pooh !

CECILY : " After his acquittal Bellingham disappeared, and three months later overwhelming evidence against him came to light."

BRUCE : Louder, dear, please !

CECILY : " The bodies of four of his victims were discovered buried under the cellars of various houses he had rented from time to time."

BRUCE : Can't you speak louder ?

CECILY (*very loudly*) : " Possessed of an extraordinary fascination, he would make the acquaintance of a girl, persuade her to marry after a few weeks, or even days' acquaintance, and then induce her to sign papers making over any sum of money she might possess to him."

BRUCE : I still can't hear you.

CECILY (*almost shouting*) : " It was his habit to rent a small place in an out-of-the-way neighbourhood. After living there for two or three months, he would announce to neighbours or acquaintances that he and his wife were going abroad for some time. The fact that the Mrs. Bellingham of the moment was never actually seen to leave the place seems to have awakened no suspicion. Yet, in every case the cellar could have told a guilty secret, and if——" (*She falters in her reading and the book slips from her lap.*) Tell me, Bruce, do you think that supposing one of these women had found out beforehand and had made an appeal to him, she could have stopped him ?

BRUCE : Why do you ask ?

Mechanically she picks up the cigarette-box and takes out a cigarette; she leaves the box on her lap. During the ensuing scene she fidgets with the cigarette and tears it to pieces.

CECILY : Well, it's interesting to know how that sort of man's mind works. Do you think if he'd been fond

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

of the woman—and I suppose he was fond of some of them——

BRUCE : Oh, yes, a bit, certainly.

CECILY : Well, then, don't you think he might have listened to an appeal ?

BRUCE : The situation never arose—I should imagine. But no—no, I'm quite sure he wouldn't have let anything influence him.

CECILY : But if, as you say, he'd cared——

BRUCE : You see—you don't understand—it was his profession. These women represented to him certain sums of money.

CECILY : I see. But supposing if she'd said to him, "Look here, I know who you are and what you're after. I am at your mercy, you can take my money—all of it——"

BRUCE : Ah, but he'd got their money already.

CECILY : Yes, but if she'd said, "I don't mind. You're robbing me of every penny I possess. If only you'll let me go, I won't attempt to prosecute you, I won't inform the police." What do you suppose he would have said ?

BRUCE : Oh, he'd never have taken the risk of letting her go. (*With a laugh*) Can you imagine any man risking his life on a woman's silence ?

CECILY : And yet, you'd think he'd be glad of any chance of escaping the horror of the actual . . . but then . . . perhaps it didn't seem—perhaps there wasn't any horror in it for him ?

BRUCE (*dreamily*) : No. You see there are other sides to it. Power—the culmination of the race, the climax of the music—a feeling that is almost god-like—one moment to hold some one in your arms and the next moment to hold something.

The clock begins to strike nine.

BRUCE'S attention is riveted on it—he is fascinated.

ACT III.—SCENE II.

CECILY, *her gaze wandering round in a caged, desperate fashion, becomes aware of the cigarette-box in her lap. She picks it up and from it suddenly gets an idea. She has just time to convey a wild hope when BRUCE begins to come towards her.*

BRUCE: Now!

CECILY: No! Wait!

BRUCE: Everything's ready—I prepared it early this morning. I'll carry you down there if you won't come, and it doesn't matter how much you scream—no one will hear you.

CECILY: Wait! I've got something to tell you.

BRUCE: I don't want to hear.

CECILY: This is important—it's about murder!

BRUCE (*checked*): Eh?

CECILY: I know it'll interest you—it must—because it concerns you—vitaly.

BRUCE: What do you mean?

CECILY: You'll see. Listen, Bruce, it would be a queer thing, wouldn't it, if a murderer were to marry a murderess?

BRUCE: That's a strange idea.

CECILY: Yes, indeed—far stranger than anything in the *Arabian Nights*—yet perfectly true. It's about a woman who killed some one and was never found out.

She has placed the table between them by now. Her intensity compels him.

Sit down!

There is a pause.

BRUCE: Well, what are you waiting for?

CECILY (*she is thinking desperately*): I want to get it perfectly clear in my mind, the complete truth, because you see, it's my own story, Bruce.

BRUCE: *Your* story?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

CECILY : I've killed a man, Bruce, and I've never been found out.

BRUCE : *You* have ?

CECILY : I've never told any one in the world about it. You know what it's like, you must know what it's like to hide a secret like that.

BRUCE : Yes, it's almost unbearable sometimes. Well ?

CECILY : To begin with, I've been married before.

BRUCE : What ?

CECILY : No one knew about it except my mother.

BRUCE : When was this ?

CECILY : When I was eighteen. I was his secretary. He had money. I was terribly tired of being poor and I thought it was a way out.

BRUCE : Well ?

CECILY : But he was mean—horribly mean. He used to grudge me every penny. It was he who put the idea into my head. He used to say, "If we're careful now, there'll be all the more for me to leave you."

BRUCE : Where did all this happen ?

CECILY : Er—on the east coast—a horrible little place—the wind never seemed to stop blowing.

BRUCE : Go on.

CECILY : I thought I should never get away from it. I turned plan after plan over in my mind and at last my opportunity came.

BRUCE : What was it ? Poison ? Women usually use poison.

CECILY : No, it was something much safer than that. That winter he was taken seriously ill. The doctor came and said it was pneumonia. I pretended to be heartbroken—it deceived everybody. Even in his illness, my husband's meanness got the better of him. He would only have one

ACT III.—SCENE II.

nurse, so I relieved her at night. Every one remarked on my devotion—I took care of that.

BRUCE : That was clever of you.

CECILY : The doctor gave me the most careful instructions—the warmth of the room, and so on. One night, when I was alone with him, the crisis came. I knelt down by his bedside and prayed that he would—die. I must have been on my knees a long time—when I looked up I saw that he had sunk into a deep sleep. The crisis was over and he was going to get better. I went to the window. I can see myself now, standing there—the frost had made such pretty patterns on the window panes—standing there, making up my mind.

There is a pause.

BRUCE : You opened the window ?

CECILY : The air was like a knife. I stripped the bed-clothes off him and left the door open. I went out and waited on the landing.

There is a long pause.

It didn't take very long. When I went back into the room he was dead. I closed the window, made up the fire—I even put fresh hot-water bottles in the bed. Then I 'phoned the doctor.

Another pause.

BRUCE : No one suspected ?

CECILY : Not a thing. The doctor—every one—was terribly sorry for me.

BRUCE : And the money ?

CECILY : Er—I was rather foolish about that—it didn't last very long.

BRUCE : Oh, I understand so well. I always do exactly the same. (*He rises.*) But there's just one thing I don't understand—

CECILY : Oh ?

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

BRUCE: Why have you been telling me all this now?

CECILY: Well, don't you see—you know all about me now—I can't possibly give you away—I thought perhaps we might be useful to each other in the future.

BRUCE: Yes—yes, that's rather a good idea, if only——

CECILY: If only what?

BRUCE: If only there was a grain of truth in your story!

Pause.

Very clever of you, Cecily, dear, arousing my interest and trying to put me off. I know where you got the story from—I've read the book myself.

She sinks down hopelessly by the coffee table, mechanically she puts the cup straight; in doing so her attention is suddenly centred on the coffee.

I remembered it the moment you told me that bit about the frost on the window panes . . . and I remember that bit about the hot-water bottles struck me as such a clever idea when I read it. (*He laughs.*) You, *you*—opening the windows and waiting for him to die! You didn't really expect me to believe that story, did you?

CECILY (*rising with desperate calmness*): No! I never for one moment expected you to believe it. I didn't care whether you did or not.

BRUCE: What?

CECILY: There's something you've forgotten. . . . I didn't drink any coffee!

BRUCE: Coffee? What has that got to do with it?

CECILY: I only wanted to hold your attention for a little while—to gain time—time for the stuff to work.

BRUCE (*standing frozen with growing horror*): I don't believe it—it's another story—you couldn't——

CECILY: You were right—it was a funny coincidence Dr. Gribble reading that book.

ACT III.—SCENE II.

BRUCE: Gribble? He—he gave you . . . (*Convinced, he struggles towards her.*)

CECILY: It's all so simple, don't you see. He's been attending you for some time—there'll be no need for any inquiry!

BRUCE: You . . . You . . .

CECILY: Now it's taking effect, you're going deathly pale—it's beginning to choke you!

BRUCE *sinks almost hypnotised into a chair.*

It's starting to paralyse you—you can't move, can you? You can't move.

BRUCE (*choking*): I . . . (*He shakes his head.*) I . . .

CECILY *steals round his chair, still keeping him under her control.*

CECILY: You're going numb and cold now—it's stealing all over you. . . . You can't move hand or foot—

There is a terrible rasping noise in BRUCE's throat.

There is a loud knocking on the door. CECILY rushes to the door. NIGEL's voice is heard outside.

NIGEL (*off*): Cecily, Cecily, are you there?

CECILY (*screaming hysterically*): Nigel! Nigel! Help me! Quickly! (*She struggles with the handle.*) God! It's locked! He's got the key! I can't—! Let me out! Let me out! I can't bear it! I shall go mad! (*She is hammering wildly on the door and screaming.*)

There is a smash of glass. NIGEL opens the window and enters. He takes in the scene at a glance and rushes straight to CECILY. MAVIS follows him; at the sight of BRUCE she shrinks back in the window.

NIGEL: It's all right, darling. Quiet! Quiet! You're quite safe now.

MAVIS: Thank God we came back!

CECILY (*crying hysterically*): Take me out! Take me out!

LOVE FROM A STRANGER

NIGEL *puts his arm around her and leads her to the window.*

NIGEL : It's all right, darling. It's all right. We're with you. He can't touch you now. It's all right.

Their voices become indistinct.

There is silence. The clock chimes the quarter past the hour.

BRUCE'S *body relaxes, pitches forward and rolls slowly to the floor.*

CURTAIN.

